

Nili Portugali

A Holistic Approach to Architecture  
"The Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library", Tel Aviv







To whoever aspires to create timeless places endowed with spirit and soul, that we really we want to live in.  
In any culture, in any society in any place.

**Nili Portugali**

# **A Holistic Approach to Architecture**

**"The Felicja Blumental Music Center and Library", Tel Aviv**



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# Content

<b>Preface</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Introduction:</b>	<b>8</b>
The urban context – "Bialik Hill" as a place / Maoz Azaryahu	8
"Music Center and Library" – collections and activities	13
The layout of activities within the building	13
<b>On the architecture of "The Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library", by others</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Biographical milestones - the background for the emergence of the holistic approach</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Architecture is made for people - A phenomenological approach to architecture</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Between two worldviews - the holistic approach Vs. the mechanistic approach. The relationship between the parts and the whole</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>The "Music Center and Library" - A dialogue between a new building and an existing historical environment</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>The beauty is in the details. The detail is not an ornamental for its own sake</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>The generative language of the building. Beauty as an objective matter</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>The planning process and the spirit of the square</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>The connection between modern technology and tradition. Why everyone thinks (mistakenly) that the building is a reconstruction and not a new one, actually built on an empty lot in 1996?</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Concluding notes: The relationship between values and facts - A new paradigm and the concept of "One Value"</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>42</b>
Biography	42
Competitions awards & entries	42
Selected publications about "The Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library" building	43
Acknowledgments	44
<b>Pictures, Illustrations &amp; Drawings</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Visual chronology of projects and buildings 1973-2011</b>	<b>73</b>

# Preface

In this book, I shall introduce you to the interpretation given in architecture to the holistic-organic worldview. A worldview that has stood in recent years at the forefront of the scientific discourse as a whole in disciplines like cosmology, neurobiology, psychology, particle physics and brain sciences, and is also linked to recent theories of complexity. It is in convergence with the fundamentals of Buddhist philosophy, the two worlds my work is associated with.

This will be demonstrated through the story of the "The Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library" building, which I designed on Bialik Square in Tel Aviv, the construction of which was completed in 1996. It is a well-known public building that, more than any other building I have designed, forms a coherent representation of a complete worldview, a humanistic worldview that I have been implementing for over 38 years of work designing projects in Israel and other places. The book will demonstrate how this approach, as well as the unique planning process I follow - a process fundamentally different from conventional ones - were implemented in the design of this building at each stage level. In relation to the historical and physical reality of the urban environment in which it was built, Bialik Square being a unique interface between the Orient and the West, a unique Israeli creation. An interface I personally represent as a seventh-generation descendent from a family (Berenson) living in the Galilee city of Safed since the early 19th century and granddaughter of Dr. Nissan Kahan, founder of the Zionist movement in Hungary.

The basic assumption presented, is that beauty and harmony in architecture (and in man-made work of art) are objective properties inherent within the structure itself and the process by which they are created.

My personal experience in the various creative fields allows me to confidently state that there is no essential difference between designing a town square, a building, a chair, the layout of a book or a film, such as the one I am currently writing its script and will be directing. The same set of rules which determines the correct relationship between the parts and the whole and gives a sense of unity in architecture, applies in its abstract definition to anything consisting of matter, form and color, at any level of scale. The difference lies in the content, the components and the level of complexity.

The Bialik district, with Bialik Square at its center, is undergoing a process of renewal which is raising widespread public interest. A good indication of this is the large number of people visiting the square in general and the active "Music Center and Library" in particular.

In Bialik Square one can see the work carried out by architects during the period between the 1920's and the beginning of the 1930's. They were Jewish refugees from Europe, searching for a unique Israeli architectural language that would stem from the place itself. They successfully created a language with local identity. I was searching for such an identity when I began the design of the "Music Center and Library" building - the only new building erected in the square since that period.

The aim of this book is to raise broad public discussion regarding central debates concerning the public, and to challenge 21st-century architecture, as to how we should intervene with a new contemporary building within an existing urban environment - one with a significant historical value which we must respect and preserve - while still using the full potential inherited in the modern technological age in which we live.

The definitions given by me for terms such as "quality" or "assimilation of values for preserving the environment" have a broader meaning than the commonly used ones. In my definition, the human being is the central environmental resource which the architect must pay attention to when approaching the design of the physical environment in which we live.

# Introduction

## The urban context - "Bialik Hill" as a place / Maoz Azaryahu

Organic integration between the building of the Music Center and Library (1996) in the center, and the historical square.



Long distance view to Bialik Square (Hill) from Idelson Street (left).

The journalist Uri Keisari claimed in an article he wrote in 1932 that: "Tel Aviv is too flat. Therein lays the secret of its (specific!) secularity".<sup>1</sup> The popular image of Tel Aviv as a city built on a plain is certainly true in comparison with Jerusalem or Haifa, but in fact Tel Aviv is not completely flat. The city's topography was clearly visible before the sands were covered by buildings, roads, sidewalks and gardens. Alter Droyanov referred to the urban topography of Tel Aviv in his *Tel Aviv Book* published in 1936. He mentioned the partially destroyed hills on the seaside, as well as the second row of hills further away from the shore. According to him, Bialik Hill was prominent in the second row of hills. Northeast of it was a lower plot of land with no drainage to the sea, on which Meir Park was built in the 1930's.<sup>2</sup>

Long distance view to Bialik Square (Hill) from The Steps Alley.

According to current data from the Engineering Department of the Tel Aviv Municipality, the hill is almost 18 meters above sea level. Not much, but enough to make the modest, nameless hill stand out in contrast to its nearby surroundings. In 1936, after the area was mostly built up, Droyanov stated: "This is the only place in Tel Aviv where there's a need to use stairs in the streets, and this phenomenon - stairs in the street - is usually uncommon in a city far away from the mountains".<sup>3</sup>

Places are characterized by their landscapes and architectural forms and are identified with



experiences and memories, images and myths. The way a place is perceived is an amalgamation of the interactions between the physical environment and the human activities that take place within it and in relation to it. However, beyond these elements, the name of a place distinguishes it and sets it apart in the geography of the culture. The naming of a site



Entrance to Bialik Square from Bialik Street, Opposite is the first municipal building, on the right the Music Center and Library.

The way to Bialik Square from Bialik Street, H.N.Bialik residence on the right corner (left).

is a vital stage in turning that space into a defined place within the human environment.

Droyanov named the hill *Bialik Hill*, however this was not the official name but rather one that combined the topographical aspect of the site with the cultural significance of the place. At the start of the 1920's what was then known as *Bezalel Hill* started to develop. This name was also unofficial. The hill was named after Bezalel Yaffe - one of the founders of *Chevra Chadasha* (A New Society), who purchased the land on which Allenby Street was later built, and who himself owned a plot of land at the top of the hill. Among the plot owners was Chaim Nachman Bialik, who in 1922 decided to build his house in Tel Aviv. The plot he purchased was on top of the hill. A map dated 1923 already featured the street as Bialik Street.

Mayor Meir Dizengoff knew Bialik back in Odessa. For him, the residence of Bialik in Tel Aviv was a major contribution to the establishment of the first Hebrew city as the capital of cultural revival. In March of 1924 a festive reception was held in honor of Bialik in Tel Aviv. Addressing Bialik, Ravnitzki wrote: "Instead of the abounding sands you saw while standing on the coast of Yafo, your eyes shall behold a city so new in its beauty, the first Hebrew city!"<sup>4</sup>

Topographical constraints were evident in the planning of the new street. Bialik Street started at Allenby Street and ended in a plaza surrounded by plots which were also marked as part of the street. For those entering from Allenby Street, the stairs descending to the north served as a direct continuation of Bialik Street.

The first building on the hill was *Rigger House*, a single-story house built in 1922 and designed by Alexander Levi.<sup>5</sup> In 1924 two additional buildings were constructed around the plaza at the end of Bialik Street. On top of the hill, at the highest point of the local topography, *Bialik House* was built, planned by Joseph Minor. The entrance to the building was from the street and not the plaza. *Skora House* was intended to be a hotel and was planned by architect Moshe Cherner and commissioned by American entrepreneur Eliezer Philip Skora. The entrance to the building faced the plaza. Since the building was situated at the end of the line of vision of those coming from Allenby Street, this created the impression that the street led to the building.

International style, building on the corner of Bialik Square.



At the corner of the plaza and Idelson Street, Balder House was built in 1925. With time the empty plots around the square were replaced by buildings. This was a gradual process which was largely completed by the mid 1930's. In 1931 *Shenkar House* was built adjacent to the municipality building. The building served as the family residence of industrialist Arie Shenkar. It was designed by architect Dov Hershkovitz. A stairway leading from the plaza to Dvora Ha-Nevi'aa Street (later to be named Zalman Shneur Street) separated *Shenkar House* from the municipality building. In 1934, *Yoshefa House* was built in the International style next to the municipality building. The house was designed by architect Shlomo Gepstein. In 1935 opposite Bialik another house was built in the International style.



The significance of Bialik Hill to the urban texture of the rapidly developing city, was officially realized in the summer of 1925, when Skora House, originally built as a hotel, became the residence of the Tel Aviv municipality. In 1921 Tel Aviv received the status of "township". This was a crucial step on the Hebrew City's road to independence (Tel Aviv was declared a city only in January of 1934). The change in Tel Aviv's municipal status and the impressive growth of its population were also



expressed in the need to transfer the municipal offices to an appropriate building. The old residence of the Tel Aviv Committee, which was the water tower on Rothschild Street, was not suited to meet the needs of the municipality. The municipality was transferred to the building at the top of the hill in the summer of 1925. The building was intended as a temporary location, until the municipality's permanent residence would be constructed.

With the transfer of the municipality to its new residence, the place became what may be termed "the civic center of the Hebrew city". While the municipality building was positioned at the top of the hill (although not at its highest point, which was claimed by Bialik's residence), the hill was merely a local reference point. Furthermore, the municipality building was not monumental, and in that respect it did not serve Bruno Taut's concept of *Die Stadtkrone* (the City Crown): a monumental structure which stands out against the backdrop of its surroundings, symbolizing strength and authority.<sup>6</sup> Aside from this, the building was situated at the end of the line of vision of those entering the street, and thus stood out in the local landscape.

The plaza at the end of Bialik Street created a geographic context shared by various buildings. The spatial proximity also had a mythical dimension. The physical proximity of Bialik's residence to the municipal offices cemented the vision of the Hebrew city in concrete terms of location and architecture: the municipal offices were representative of the city as a political entity and civil community, while Bialik's residence represented Hebrew culture and national revival as an essential aspect of Tel Aviv. Arie Shenkar's residence next to the municipality building invested the place, which was already saturated with Zionist associations, with additional symbolic meaning: the home of the "father of Hebrew industry" in the land of Israel represented Dizengoff's vision of the capitalistic city in the local landscape.

Bialik's residence served as a meeting place for people from the literary scene and a place of pilgrimage for regular folks and children. Adoration for the national poet was expressed also by the fact that the house he lived in and the garden he cultivated appeared on postcards. The house, which was Bialik's home as well as a cultural institution, became an architectural icon of the Zionist revival. Bialik's peace of mind was disturbed by the public status his private home had attained, so much so that

several months before the month of Tamuz (July) 1934, the month of his death, he moved to live in Ramat Gan.

The municipality building was the city's administrative center; this was where the mayor's office and various municipal offices were located, and this was also where the mayor held receptions for high-ranking delegations and guests who visited the city. In June of 1947 an UNSCOP delegation, touring British mandate Palestine in a fact-finding mission before recommending the partition of the land, met with Mayor Israel Rokach at his office. In this meeting Mayor Israel Rokach presented Tel Aviv's achievements as an example of Jewish self-rule. In December of 1952 Tel Aviv welcomed Israel's President Itzhak Ben Zvi. The festive reception was held at the municipality building.

The plaza in front of the municipality building was a public space, and despite its limited dimensions, it served as a city square of sorts, a place where citizens congregated on festive occasions. Old photographs teach us that plants were planted in the center of the plaza. At first there was a square garden with seedlings, later it became a round garden with cacti. In 1936 a fountain was built at the center of the plaza. Steps led from the plaza up to the entrance of the municipality building. This formulated the hierarchical relationship between the municipal authority and the citizenry. On special occasions the mayor would address the public gathered on the plaza from the balcony at the front of the building. On celebrations and special events the municipality building was decorated with flags and special lighting.

The plaza functioned as the "city square" in the ceremonial fabric of Tel Aviv. Crowds would gather there for large funerals of renowned personages and during celebrations. Mass funeral processions stopped in front of the municipality building on their way to the old cemetery on Trumpeldor Street. The first funeral procession was that of Max Nordau, who was re-interred in Tel Aviv in May of 1926. In January of 1927 the funeral procession for Ehad Ha'am stopped in front of the municipality building. Bialik addressed the crowds gathered there. Davar newspaper reported: "The plaza in front of the municipality building and all of Bialik Street were crowded to the point of suffocation".<sup>7</sup> Bialik received a similar honor in 1934, as did Dizengoff in 1936 and Dov Hoz in 1940. On anniversary celebrations of Tel Aviv in 1929 and in

1934 Dizengoff addressed Tel Aviv's schoolchildren gathered on the plaza.

The function of the plaza as the "city square" became evident when large events were held there, but such events were rare. Routinely the square served as an access route for municipal clerks and citizens in need of municipality services. Residents of the adjacent houses crossed the plaza on their way to and from their homes. Passers-by, preoccupied with their daily routine, would cross the plaza as part of their daily walking routes.

Bialik's death set off the beginning of a process which culminated in the establishment of the 'Bialik Compound' as an urban culture and historical heritage center. As part of this process the designation of buildings changed as they no longer served their original purpose. In 1937 Mania, Bialik's widow, donated Bialik House to the City of Tel Aviv to serve as a museum in memory of the national poet. Aside from the activities of the Bialik House Association, which were held at the site, the house was dedicated to cultivating and perpetuating Bialik's legacy. Visitors included "young children with their teachers, guests from Israel and tourists from overseas".<sup>8</sup> In 1962 it was reported that approximately 150 thousand people visited Bialik House each year.<sup>9</sup>

In 1959, as Tel Aviv was celebrating its 50th anniversary, Arie Shenkar passed away. As a sign of mourning "national flags decorated in black were lowered over the deceased's building and the Tel Aviv's municipality building, which stand side by side".<sup>10</sup> In his solemn speech then mayor Chaim Levanon said: "Tel Aviv is now bidding farewell to one of its finest sons and founders, an honorary citizen of the city and builder of its material and spiritual economy"<sup>11</sup>. Arie Shenkar, who like Bialik and Dizengoff, was childless, dedicated his house as a historical museum of Tel Aviv.

Although the location of Tel Aviv's city hall on Bialik Hill was supposed to be temporary, the move to its permanent place of residence was delayed. In 1947 a competition was held for designing the new city square, later to become Kikar Malchei Yisrael (today known as Rabin Square). The competition for designing the new city hall adjacent to the square was held in 1957. The municipality moved to its new residence in the mid 1960's. After the municipality offices moved to the new building it was decided that the now vacant old municipality building would function as a youth center. However,

due to public criticism it ended up as the Museum of the History of Tel Aviv. In January of 1973 a mosaic by Nahum Gutman depicting the history of Yafo and the construction of the first Hebrew city was placed at the center of the plaza in front of the old municipality building.

The combination of the historical museum and Gutman's mosaic emphasized the significance of the place in terms of historical urban heritage. Converting Bialik House into a museum and library and the old municipality building into a museum of the city's history created a direct link between the city's local history and its historical legacy. However, in reality, the district which was the civic center of Tel Aviv in the mid 1920's was pushed aside to the margins of the Tel Aviv experience. Bialik House and the historical museum in the old municipality building were undergoing a process of decline. Schoolchildren still went on tours in Bialik House, but the area never became a successful focus of attraction for Tel Avivians. The historical museum ceased to function and was later shut down, and the artifacts it had housed were transferred to the Eretz Israel Museum.

On a functional level it appears that a daycare center operating in the building situated between Bialik House and Shenkar House had become a center of local activity. Except for rainy days, weekends and holidays, the afternoon hours were the peak of activity on the plaza surrounding Gutman's fountain. At these times it was filled with toddlers playing while their parents watched over them after leaving the daycare center. Early in the day one could hear the sound of the children's voices playing in the backyard of the daycare center, and sometimes even the voices of groups of students visiting the garden in Bialik House.

The process of converting Bialik Hill into Bialik Compound was gradual and included functional and architectural upgrading, renovation and rebuilding. The plaza eventually would receive the unofficial title of Bialik Square. Turning the place into an urban attraction necessitated a combination of the 'discovery' of Bialik Street and the plaza at its end. The urban revival process was financed and supervised by the municipality. The 'discovery' of the street evinced a significant rise in public interest in the history of Tel Aviv in general, and its architectural history in particular. Bialik Street and the plaza at its end became a favorite destination of tours. Groups with their tour guides gathered around

Gutman's mosaic and heard about the history of the area, which in its heyday, served as the "civic center" of the first Hebrew city.

The official aspect of upgrading the area focused on three buildings: Bialik House, Shenkar House and the old municipality building, as well as the plaza which creates the geographical and historical context they all share. The task of upgrading the area commenced in the 1990's. The municipality demolished Shenkar House in its entirety, and in its place a new building was erected, designed by architect Nili Portugali. This building was intended to function as a music center and library. The building's bold colors and architectural innovation stood in stark contrast to its neglected environment. The new building and the cultural activities that took place in it, gave the area a new vitality.

About a decade after the construction of *The Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library*, Bialik House was renovated. It became a venue for literary events such as the launching of new books or evening seminars. Bialik Compound developed as an urban cultural center. As part of the area's revival the plaza became a gathering place during festive events such as the *White Night* celebrations

that mark the declaration of the *White City* in Tel Aviv as a world heritage site.

The target date for upgrading the district was the 100th anniversary celebrations of Tel Aviv. As the anniversary neared, renovations started on the old municipality building, which was supposed to function as the city's historical museum. The name of the old municipality building was converted to *Beit Ha'ir* (City House, in Hebrew): a place which held the memories of the city and displayed its history. The term Bait (house, or home in Hebrew) emphasizes the fact that the institution belongs to the citizens of the city. In contrast to Bialik House, which is dedicated to the story of the national poet who built it and dwelled in it, *Beit Ha'ir* is dedicated to the city and tells its collective story.

On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009 the ceremony declaring the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of Tel Aviv was held in Bialik Square. The ceremony was a tribute to the history of Tel Aviv and was attended by invitation only. The guests of honor included the mayor in office and the President of the State of Israel. For the public the opening ceremony was held two days later in Rabin Square, Tel Aviv's City Square.

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1. U. Keisari, "Why Do I Love Tel Aviv?", *Kolno'a*, 2(4), January 29th, 1932, p. 6.
  2. A. Droyanov, *Tel Aviv Book*, Tel Aviv Book Committee, Tel Aviv 1936, p. 283.
  3. Ibid.
  4. "Welcome!", *Haaretz*, March 26th, 1924.
  5. About the buildings see: S. Vidrich, *Bialik the Street*, Porat Publishing, Tel Aviv 2004.
  6. B. Taut, *Die Stadtkrone*, Jena 1919.
  7. *Davar*, January 3rd, 1927.
  8. *Davar*, Letter to the Editor, October 25th, 1961.
  9. *Davar*, Letter to the Editor, July 26th, 1962.
  10. *Davar*, October 6th, 1959.
  11. *Davar*, November 13th, 1959.

## "Music Center and Library" - Collections and Activities

The Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library is the residence of the largest public library for music in Israel. Among the library's collections are:

- Books on all topics related to music, professional literature and popular literature.
- All manner of composer manuscripts, sheet music, chamber and orchestral music.
- Collections of Israeli music, Hebrew songs and Jewish music.
- A collection of rare books and early editions from various estates.
- Approximately 7000 CDs as well as videotapes and audio cassettes.
- Approximately 18,000 records including rare recordings never copied to CD.
- 65 professional journals.
- A collection of ethnic musical instruments.

The library offers its visitors bibliographical consulting services and assistance with searching databases in Israel and abroad. In addition it houses archives which are of great importance to researchers and research institutions in Israel and

abroad:

- The archive of violinist Bronislaw Huberman, founder of the philharmonic orchestra and one of the instigators of the Pan-European movement. The archive contains rare manuscripts, certificates, dedications and correspondence with the greatest musicians, intellectuals/philosophers and statesmen of his time.
- The archive of Yehoyachin Stuchevsky - violinist and cellist.
- The archive of Menashe Rabina - chronicler of musical life in Israel from its earliest days (particularly in Tel Aviv).
- The archive of Leviim House - the first music school in Tel Aviv and in Israel.
- Additional small archives.

In addition to the library, concerts, lectures, exhibitions, workshops and master classes are also held at the music center and library. These include chamber music concerts and recitals, performances by jazz ensembles and vocal groups involving famous musicians from Israel and around the world.<sup>12</sup>

## The layout of activities within the building

The entrance to the building from the square is through an open porch. At the front of the entrance floor is a lobby overlooking the square. This leads to the auditorium, separated from it by a glass partition through which one can see the auditorium and beyond it through its windows the orange trees in the garden.



Entrance floor - the lobby, the auditorium and the back garden form one visual continuum.

On the side of the lobby is a wide beautiful staircase, a space unto itself, which leads to the

open upper floors that overlook it. The staircase has high windows which let the sunlight come in and illuminate all parts of the building.



The lending library is situated on the first floor. The catalogue area and lending desk are situated at the front, and overlooks the square. The sheet music and books are kept in the back of the library.

The museum, intended for displaying the center's collection of musical instruments as well



as Temporary Exhibitions, is located on the second floor. Beyond the exhibition hall, behind a glass partition, is the reading and periodicals room. Behind it is the archive. These three spaces form a one visual continuum.



Behind a glass partition is the audiovisual room which also has a view to the sea.



The audiovisual library which houses CDs, videotapes and records is located on the third floor.

Third floor - The audiovisual library, the lending area, the audiovisual room and the terrace overlooking the square form one visual continuum.



Behind the catalogue area and lending desk is a roof terrace, both overlooking the square and the sea further ahead.



12. This excerpt is taken out of the official website of the Tel Aviv Municipality.

# On the architecture of "The Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library", by others

## **Shlomo Lahat, Mayor of Tel Aviv-Yafo (from 1974 to 1993)**

"As the mayor of Tel Aviv- Jaffa, once I had the opportunity to know architect Nili Portugali and to be familiar with her projects in the city.

Nili Portugali is an intelligent architect who has an architectural concept based on socially involvement, aesthetics and high professional level. Her works are an excellent expression of her concept primarily creating a human and aesthetical environment for its users.

I like her works in Tel Aviv very much. Nili understands the spirit of the city which is expressed in her works.

Her buildings are beautiful, graceful as well as functional and friendly. But, above all, for me, they are Tel Aviv.

There's no doubt that her projects are a great success. The best proof is the great number of activities and the great number of uses. Each project has its own assignment but all her projects have the warm and human atmosphere which make people

love and enjoy it.

When I speak about her projects in Tel Aviv-Jaffa, I mean: the Community center for Senior Citizens on Rashi street, donated by Mr. Uzi Tzucker, Yeffet and Ha'zorfim streets in old Jaffa, - this was not yet built, it was planned, but I'm sure it's an outstanding planning, I know the planning, and it will be built very soon, and you'll see that I was right, The Music Library in the building of the public library of Tel Aviv-Beit Ariela, The Music Center and Library on Bialik street, where we are located here and the New Residential Building on Ha'shomer street at the area of Na'halat Binyamin(...).

I feel lucky that architect Nili Portugali worked in the city of Tel Aviv - Jaffa during my tenure of office as the mayor. I appreciate her important contribution to our city.

I wish you, Nili, more projects and success, and we at least as citizens of the city of Tel Aviv deserve it." <sup>13</sup>

## **Professor Rachel Sebba, Vice Dean, the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning, Technion Institute of Technology, Haifa (from 2005 to 2008)**

"The emotional and ongoing experience I had on my first visit to the building designed by Portugali, an experience enhanced with every returning visit to this place, led me to an interest in its creator. I discovered that this was not just intuitive design or a random impulse of talent but rather an expression of a complete and structured worldview which is present in her writings, in her lectures and in her structured and systematic teaching courses[...] Nili Portugali designs according to a unique and complex worldview, using analytical tools she has assimilated in her own unique way based on the teachings of Christopher Alexander [...]. Anyone familiar with her architectural work and approach can see that Alexander's philosophy constitutes only one of the elements within the method she has developed. She combines patterns she has identified according to his method with a multidimensional

philosophical outlook she acquired through her life. Through her studies in the Far East, by observing the environment in all its complexity (not reduced to a formal or rational model), from her own intimate habitus in the alleys of Safed and during her general studies [...]she has continuously developed her observational methods. The outcome of her design, based as she claims, on the holistic phenomenological approach to architecture, meets with the highest standards for the preservation of local assets of a place (structural, ecological, cultural). It is also compliant with the highest standards of the organic and humane architecture which is based on a profound understanding of the principles of human perception and the incentive to explore the values guiding the society for which she is building [...].As an example, "The Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library" - the only

new building built on Bialik Street in Tel Aviv which integrates in an organic fashion (on the outside as well as on the inside) with the fabric of the street and its unique ambience (in spirit and not only in language) without however losing any of its unique character as a place for social gatherings for music lovers. Inside, in the center, a small and amazing auditorium, resembles the shape of an organ that gives the listener the feeling that he is close to the stage. The auditorium opens onto both the entrance area and the view of the garden outside. This concurs with Nili's principle of spatial continuity - a principle which creates an experience of continuity from the moment

you approach the building, walk through the entrance lobby until you reach your seat in the auditorium[...]. Nili Portugali consciously strives to achieve an architecture which expresses the social context of the place and the cultural meaning of the function the building is intended to fulfill. She will pleasure the senses and the soul of the visitors, an experience that we all share as human beings. She does not impose her buildings on the site, but rather creates in the space a continuous and ongoing experience through the interrelationship she generates between man and place - while connecting to the characters and history of both [...]"<sup>14</sup>

## **Andreas Scholl - the world's famous countertenor**

"When I was told I couldn't perform in Jerusalem as planned having to perform at the Music Center and Library here in Tel Aviv I was disappointed, now

that I'm here I have to say that I'm thankful to who made that decision, this auditorium is absolutely wonderful [...]"<sup>15</sup>

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13. Brought courtesy of Ziva and Shlomo Lahat - excerpt from his speech in the building at the launching event for Nili Portugali's first published book (May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007).
  14. Text brought courtesy of Rachel Sebba.
  15. This excerpt is taken from Words he said on the stage in the auditorium at the "Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library", where he performed.

# Biographical milestones - the background for the emergence of the holistic approach

I am a practicing architect working in Israel for more than 38 years designing buildings, doing research, writing, teaching architecture and recently writing a script for a feature documentary film I will be directing. My work focuses on both practice and theory, and is tightly connected to the Phenomenological-Holistic School of Thought.

In this chapter I shall present the milestones in my biography which have most influenced my work in the various creative fields I have been engaged with in general, and in architecture in particular. These include the various sources of knowledge I have been exposed to during my formal architectural studies, my studies of Buddhist Philosophy, and most important of all - the place I grew up in, the Kabbalist city of Safed,<sup>16</sup> my heritage and my roots as a seventh generation descendant of a family that has lived in the place since the 19th century.

Tombstones  
whitewashed in  
light blue,  
ancient  
cemetery, Safed.

Walls of the  
houses in the  
alley  
whitewashed in  
light blue,  
Safed.



I shall do so by presenting their linkage to the streams of thought that were evolving in architecture at the time, including the emergence of the holistic approach which I eventually adopted in my work.

My curiosity about what lies at the foundation of this organic architecture started with my first year as a student of architecture in the Technion Institute of Technology in Haifa, Israel, at the end of the 1960s.

I wanted to understand what lay behind those places and buildings that make us feel "at home", what powered them with so much beauty and gave them a soul that make us return to them again and

again. I needed to understand the processes by which these buildings were created, I followed this search all through my studies at the Architectural Association School of Architecture (A.A) in London (Diploma 1973) and my post graduate studies in architecture and Buddhist philosophy at Berkeley University, California (1979-1981) and my work with Prof. Christopher Alexander at the Center for Environmental Structure in Berkeley (1979-1981), and all along the years of my work.

My intuitive feeling was that what lies behind those places and buildings were facts, reasons and objective truth, I wanted to understand and act upon it in my design work.

The mid 1960's were a breaking point in the world of architecture. There was a feeling and consensus that the mechanistic worldview, upon which modern architecture was based on, had gone bankrupt as it did not give any decent answer to the human relationship between man and environment. Places like Brasilia in Brazil, Chandigarh in India, the satellite towns such as Milton Keynes that were built in England during the late 1960's and the 1970's, the new neighborhoods built in Jerusalem post 1967 war were all designed and built adopting the mechanistic approach. One of its founders, and apparently responsible for the disastrous outcome that followed from it, was the famous architect Le Corbusier. These alienated places were a clear expression of the lack of an organic order. However the forces that were inherent in modern architecture, like the ones inherent in contemporary architecture we are witnessing these days, have gained such a strong foothold, that many were afraid - and still are - to express their reservations, and all the more so, to make a change.

The late 1960s and early 1970s brought to the forefront of science in general and architecture in particular the quantitative methodological approach, as presented in Geoffrey Broadbent's book, *Design in Architecture, Architecture and the Human Sciences* (John Wiley & Sons 1973). According to this theory, the creative process is a product of



quantitative planning methods, where complex relationships between man and his environment are defined by matrixes and formulas. I adopted this logical and systematic working process, which enabled me to identify and separate the various elements of a building required by the program and combine them to a whole. This resulted in plans that at the conventional level were indeed neat, reasoned and coherent. The projects that grew out of this basically mechanistic methodology met the physical and social needs of their users, but only partially answered their emotional and spiritual needs. In other words, this methodology was not aimed to create buildings with a soul.

The Disappointment of the modernism led to a search for new ways. In the early 1970's I left the Technion and moved to London to continue my studies at the A.A. - the well known school of architecture. I found a school where the main theme in teaching architecture was conceptual. This was in line with conceptual art starting to flourish at that time, first exposed in an exhibition named "When Attitude Becomes Form", held at the ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts) gallery in London. It became a landmark in the art world.



From the exhibition: "When Attitudes become form", ICA Gallery, London, 1969.

In discussions held at the time in the A.A by main stream followers, man's environment was conceived as a mere metaphor for science fiction, completely ignoring and even belittling anyone who tried to speak about the **emotional**-human experiential relation between man and place.

This conceptual approach developed, and led later on to the emergence of new movements, each one attempting in its own way to find a solution and a way out of the disappointment and despair brought on by modern architecture. Among them, the "Archigram" in London (Based on their theory, 15 years later the Pompidou Center was designed by other architects in Paris), the post modernistic

stream- The New York Five on the east coast of the U.S, The New Tradition clinging to the past and the deconstruction stream still starring today. These movements, although different from each other, have one thing in common and that is their basic assumption that there is no absolute truth behind architecture and that beauty and comfort are subjective concepts that have to do with style, fashion and the personal vision of the creator. In fact this assumption denied any objective public discussion on the definition of beautiful architecture. Not one of these movements attempted to seriously confront the crisis at hand or make changes in order to resolve it.

In 1973 I completed my studies in London and returned to Israel. My first commission was planning the house of the writer David Shutz in Jerusalem. The site was internal with a small opening onto the street. Stone buildings surrounded it from all sides and in the center was a lemon tree.

Unlike the conventional planning process which took place on the drawing board in the office (today on the computer screen) and then transferred to the site, here all planning decisions were taken by me on the site itself. I sat on the site for hours, trying to feel and experience physically what had happened **there**; I tried to listen to the "voices" of the place itself. Instead of "relieving" myself of any constraints and thereby uprooting the tree, the first **planning** decision I made was to leave the lemon tree in its place and design the house around it. In order to decide about the precise boundaries of the courtyard I walked back and forth; I was looking for the boundaries that would "feel right". I marked them on the ground using red chalk, and this signified the actual place on which the walls of the building would be erected.



The boundaries of the planned house were dictated and marked according to the location of the lemon tree in the courtyard, the Shutz residence, Jerusalem.

The house around the lemon tree, Shutz residence, Jerusalem (Designed by Nili Portugali).



Each planning decision regarding the location and shape of the various rooms taken as a result of that experience was marked by red chalk on the ground. These marks were later recorded on paper to become the building plan. But even in this case, where the house clearly grew out of the reality of its site, there were some critical questions that still remained open:

1. What are the rules and processes that determine the right **relationship** between the various parts of the building in order to create a whole?
2. What is the glue that creates the feeling of unity in a building? In other words, what is the secret of harmony in architecture?

I kept searching for a way to design new towns, villages, buildings and gardens with the same soul and heart-touching quality we experience in the various places we really love and want to come

The layout of the houses is organically drawn from their environment. Tinos, Greece.



Longwu monastery, Tongren, Qinghai province, China (Tibet) (Photo by Adiel Portugali).



back to again and again.

I took photos and tried to record and understand the visible structures of those organic places, using them as a model for the new projects I planned. The outcome made me understand that no place is self-existent, independent of the unique reality to which it belongs, and that planning a new environment (building) with that desired quality involves not just an application of an existing model, but a deep understanding of the Genetic codes and the processes that lead to its creation.

In the late 1970's and early 1980's I worked with Christopher Alexander at the "Center for Environmental Structure" in Berkeley. A research institute Alexander founded in the mid 1960's and directed since. I became closely familiar with all his research work and projects over the years and participated in some, such as the planning of The Cooperative village Shorashim in the Galilee, Israel. This experience both in theory and in practice made me understand in a profound and implementable way, the foundations of harmony in architecture and the operational process leading to its creation.

The approach and assumptions put forward by Christopher Alexander as early as the mid 1960's were essentially different from those of the movements mentioned before. This was an approach that by its very definition created a lot of reaction, raising the level of blood pressure of many... Alexander's basic assumption was (and still is) that beauty and harmony are an **objective** matter inherent in the structure itself, and that feelings have to do with **facts**. In other words, there is an essential link between the world of facts and the world of values. Order and beauty do not rely on the creator's subjective perception, nor are they an outcome of his arbitrary vision. They are **objective** properties related to the geometrical properties inherent in the structure itself. In his book *The Timeless Way of Building* Alexander states that all places of organic order that seem unplanned and orderless are a clear expression of order at a deeper and more complex level. This order is based on absolute rules that have always determined the quality and beauty of a place, and is the source of the good feeling about it.

I came to understand the foundations of harmony in architecture and the creative process which produce timeless buildings. The foundations of the holistic approach gave me the explanation for the organic order I was trying to understand. To this approach I was exposed at a later stage in my studies of the



fundamentals of Buddhist logic and philosophy (mainly Tibetan) from prominent teachers in general, and from His Holiness the Dalai Lama in particular. I adopted this approach and tried to interpret it in the buildings I designed.

The holistic approach is a broad and universal approach and is at conflict with the mechanistic worldview currently common in the Western world. The holistic approach lies behind all those places (including nature) that make one feel connected to the basic "oneness" of existence - a value the mathematician and architect Christopher Alexander calls: The One - The Great Self.

In his book *The Timeless Way of Building* Alexander writes, "There is one timeless way of building. It is thousands of years old, and the same today as it has always been. The great traditional buildings of the past, the villages and tents and temples in which man feels at home, have always been made by people who were very close to the center of this way. And as you will see, this way will lead anyone who looks for it to buildings which are themselves as ancient in their form as the trees and hills, and as our faces are".

The entrance to Hotel "Tel Aviv", Radbaz Alley, Safed.



Shrine for safe journey prayer, Guizhou, China (Photo by Adiel Portugali).



↓  
bottom left:  
Cross Post for praying on the main road, Crete, Greece.

Hanukah street menorah, Safed.



→  
Grandmother Rivka in the kitchen, Hotel "Tel Aviv", Safed (taken from the film directed by Nili Portugali).

However, as I made my way along these paths that marked and enlightened me, and while climbing to the summit (literally) driving up the curving road to Dharamsala (India), at the end of which I saw the temple and residence of H.H. the Dalai Lama, I

realized that this is a journey I already went through, to these questions I already had been exposed, and that the answers I was searching for I already got. There in my childhood, at my grandmother's Rivka, in the Hotel "Tel Aviv" she founded 60 years ago in a small stone building at the end of an alley in the old city of Safed\*. There was her and the extended family home, until the day she died.



This experience had the greatest impact on my vision and worldview as how a place should "feel", what is a building with a soul - a place that makes us feel "at home".

The insight of what is that "Art of making" which possesses the power to create places endowed with soul, places which inspire a feeling of "a home" and the right state of mind needed to create them, I learned from the way my grandmother Rivka





prepared the food in her kitchen at the hotel.

It is the nature of simplicity (distinguished from simplistic), the clarity and purity I absorbed from the sights I experienced in Safed.

→  
left:  
The carving of  
the lions on the  
Holy Ark were  
carved by my  
great  
grandfather  
(Abraham  
Berenson),  
Ha-Ari  
Ashkenazi  
Synagogue,  
Safed.



Watching my grandmother whitewashing the walls of the alley at the entrance to the hotel in pale blue on Passover.



Grandmother  
Rivka  
whitewashing  
the walls of the  
alley in light  
blue. (Taken  
from the film  
directed by Nili  
Portugali)

The patio surrounded by 12 rooms built with thick stone walls where the guests lived side by side with the family. The loquat tree at the center of the



Inner patio,  
Hotel "Tel Aviv",  
Safed.

courtyard, the smells coming from the fig trees in the courtyards behind entrances, and the sight of people strolling slowly down in the silence of the alleys dressed in their finest on their way to the synagogues where the family used to pray (since

the early 19th century), and whom I would join on holidays.



Out of my personal experience in various creative domains I can confidently say that there is no essential difference between designing a town square, a building, a chair, a layout of a book, a film or making the Sabbath rolls in the way my Grandmother Rivka made them in the hotel. For what makes a town square or a building a place we wish to return to again and again, so in that sense can be named Timeless, or, for that matter, what gives a book a long shelf life, or what makes us want to watch a film over and over is the fact that they all create a deep **emotional** feeling.

I always assumed that my strong and emotional attachment to Safed, to the hotel, to the character and the things Grandmother Rivka made, was generated from a subjective experience which has perhaps to do with nostalgia and my personal relationship to that place. But then I realized that other people, who came there from all over the world and from cultures and traditions different from mine, had nonetheless a similar experience to mine. That made me understand that something happens there which is beyond my personal and intimate experience, something much more basic that is common to us all as **human beings**.

What stirs in us emotionally in the stone paved courtyard in hotel "Tel Aviv", can stir in us in the whitewashed courtyard with vine on a Greek island. The quality that stirs in us as we walk an alley in a city like Safed, can stir in us as we walk an alley in a city like Tinos in Greece. As in the basis of all places that create this similar pleasant experience are Patterns of space that reflect a **human** reality, which apparently defies cross-cultural boundaries.

My acquaintance with Alexander's research and work, on the nature of spatial order, gave me the scientific "stamp of approval" that beyond the

subjective component of my experience in Safed,



something objective was happening there which had to do with the **ultimate truth**, common to us all as human beings, no matter the place, culture or religion we belong to. Therefore, the use I make of the pattern language imprinted in my mind

(subconsciously) during my childhood in Safed in the buildings I design, does not stem from some nostalgia or my intimate personal love for the place, but rather derives from the explanation given to me by the scientific world, the way that will be demonstrated further on in this book.

The mystic doctrine of the Kabala which includes various interpretations as to the nature of divinity and the work of creation, mysticism, reincarnation and the likes - has undoubtedly influenced the city of Safed's unique physical structure. For example, the sky-blue color, one of the colors of the "Zohar", which according to the Kabala connects us to the heavenly, purifies us and gives us a spiritual experience. This is the color my grandmother used to whitewash the walls of the alley at the entrance to her hotel. This is also the color seen on the houses in Safed and on the graves of the righteous.

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16. The city of Safed, dated to the period of the second temple and haven to thousands of Jews who fled from Spain and Portugal in fear of the Inquisition, became in the 16th century the most important spiritual center of the Jewish community of Eretz Israel. Many of the Jews who settled there were prominent mysticists and scholars of religious law and Kabala, including Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, who is thought to be the author of the Zohar, one of the most important Kabbalistic texts, and Rabbi Joseph Karo, author of Shulchan Aruch (code of laws).

# Architecture is made for people - A phenomenological approach to architecture

The purpose of architecture as I see it, is first and foremost to create a human environment for human beings. Nevertheless, modern society has lost sight of the central value, the human being, and created an environment in which there is a feeling of alienation between man and place.

Buildings affect our lives and the fate of the physical environment in which we live over the course of many years, and therefore their real test is the **test of time**. The fine old buildings where man feels "at home", the ones we always want to return to (from the past and the present) are thus endowed with a timeless relevance and are the ones that touch our hearts and have the power to release **feelings**.

Although this timeless quality exists in buildings in different places, rooted in different cultures and traditions, the experience they generate is similar and common to all people, no matter where or what culture they come from. Hence Alexander's basic assumption was that behind this quality, which he calls "The quality without a name" lies a universal and eternal element common to us all as **human beings**.

There are different ways to describe buildings that have this timeless quality, buildings that convey an inherent spiritual experience. Frank Lloyd Wright called them "the ones which take you beyond words". Quoted by Stephen Grabow, Christopher Alexander says: "The buildings that have a spiritual value are a diagram of the inner

universe, or the picture of the inner soul".

The experiential-emotional relationship created between people and the buildings I design - in which "The Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library" is included - occurs at all levels of the relationship that exists between man and his environment. Manifested at the urban scale, meaning the way the building contributes to the experience taking place in the public space (in this case on Bialik Square), in the interior of the building and down to the smallest details such as light fixtures, furniture, door handles,...- It is an interrelationship that takes place at a most intimate level between user and place. Contemporary architecture as well as conceptual art sought to dissociate themselves from the world of emotions, and connect the design process they follow to the world of ideas, accordingly creating a rational relation between building and man devoid of any emotion. The basic assumption presented here through the story of the "Music Center and Library"- a building I designed, is that in order to change the feeling of the environment and create places and buildings that we really feel part of and want to live in, what is needed, is not a change of style, fashion or personal vision of the creator, but an adaptation of a new worldview. A holistic and cross-cultural worldview that will transform the worldview underlying current thought and approaches which are an existential threat, to the physical and human environment in which we live.

left:  
The Tholos (4th century),  
Delphi, Greece.

The Great  
Gander Pagoda  
(7th-8th century), Hsi-an-Fu, China.

Yosef Karo  
Synagogue  
(16th century),  
Safed, Israel.





# Between two worldviews - the holistic approach Vs. the mechanistic approach

## The relationship between the parts and the whole

Random assortment of units transported from the production plant, Modiin, Israel.

The difference between the worldview which resulted in dissociating man from his environment and the worldview that considers man to be part of the physical world he lives in (as well as part of nature), emphasizes the difference between the holistic organic school of thought to which my own work belongs, and the mechanistic-fragmentary worldview. These are two different set of orders.

The mechanistic worldview dominant in Western thinking and underlying contemporary architecture separates elements, consequently creating a mechanically-ordered environment of autonomous fragments, the result of which we witness in places like Brasilia in Brazil, Chandigarh in India, the satellite towns in England, the diamond stock exchange district in Ramat Gan, or for that matter, the new neighborhoods

Detachment and alienation, Diamond Exchange, Ramat Gan, Israel.



built in Jerusalem after 1967, where the structured disconnection between the house and the street, the street and the neighborhood, the neighborhood and the city arouses a feeling of detachment and alienation.

The house appears to be a random collection of objects; the street appears to be a random collection (catalogue) of buildings that do not create together a street, (often even prefabricated transported units made in a factory and superimposed on the site);



the streets do not form together a neighborhood; and the neighborhoods do not create a city.

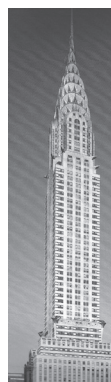
As opposed to these buildings are the ones designed for example by architects who were part of the architectural school working in Israel in the years of the "state in-the-making"\*(1920-1945). Among them were the architects Wilhelm Hecker and Eliezer Yellin who built on the streets of Rechavia neighborhood in Jerusalem, by architect Alexander Berwald - whose work includes the old Technion building in Haifa, (the present Science Museum) - and by others from that period who designed in Tel Aviv. It is clear that in the process of designing those beautiful buildings, what they had in mind was obviously us, the pedestrians strolling in the public spaces. They understood that the responsibility placed on the buildings they designed was first and foremost to the quality of the street, the boundaries of which they define. They understood that urban design does not start and ends by doing arbitrary sketches on a scale of 1:1000 but with being constantly aware of the scale of the **human being** experiencing the space - a scale of 1:1.

An experience generated by the sight of the railings of the balcony that we see from the street, the iron bar on a window, and the smell and sight of fruit trees at the entrance courtyards of the houses.

Independently of the name of its creator (the celebrity), the significance of these buildings and the appreciation we have for them lies in the essence of what they represent to us, in what **they are**, and

left:  
The courtyards  
of the houses  
create a street  
experience,  
Safed.

Details on  
building façade  
create the street  
experience,  
Chrysler  
building, New  
York.



the way we feel about them. That was the state of mind of these architects when they designed those buildings: they were immersed in **the thing itself**, thinking about **us** the users.

This school of architects in my view is similar to the unknown craftsmen who created folk art in Japan between the 13th and 19th centuries. Soetsu Yanagi, who founded the Museum of Folk Art in Tokyo, documented this art in his book *The Unknown Craftsman*. He saw this art as the materialization of a world in which the boundaries between art, philosophy and the creator's sense of a religious mission are "blurred", in as much as the creator, by attaining a state of mind in which he is **free of his ego**, can create pure Art. The artifacts they created he describes as "born and not made".

This approach was not understood by Le Corbusier, Oscar Nimier and others around the world who were part of the mechanistic school of thought who consciously considered architecture to be no

right:  
Ceremonial  
stand, porcelain,  
Yi dynasty  
(18th century),  
Korea.

Kizaemon Ido  
tea bowl, Yi  
dynasty (16th  
century), Korea.



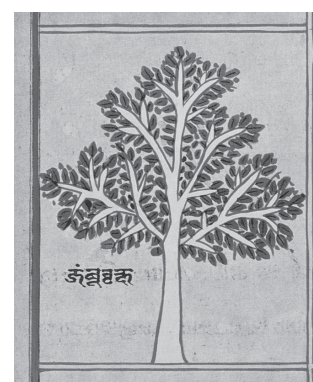
more than icons, environmental installations and fireworks, totally dependent on the arbitrary vision of its creators. These were and are the architects (the Gurus) whose ideas, the buildings and the cities they design are directly responsible for the disasters we are witnessing in the physical environmental in

which we live.

The holistic-organic approach that has been for many years at the forefront of the scientific thought in general, implemented by Christopher Alexander (Head of the Center for Environmental Structure, Berkeley California) in architecture in particular, regards the socio-physical environment as a system or a dynamic whole, the existence of which **depends** on the proper, ever-changing interrelations between the parts.

Moreover, the creation and existence of each part depends on the interrelations between that part and the system.

In any organic system while each element has



its own uniqueness and power, it always acts as part of a larger entity to which it belongs and which it complements. Having adopted this concept, I do not regard urban design, architecture, interior design and landscape design as independent disciplines removed from each other, but as **one** continuous and dynamic system. Thus the building is not perceived as a collection of designed fragments, but as one hierarchical language, in which the square, the building and its interior is one continuous system. Every design detail, at any level of scale, is derived from the larger whole to which it belongs, which it seeks to enhance and for whose existence it is responsible. The overall feeling of inner wholeness and unity whether in a building, a street, a neighborhood, a city, eventually evolves from the proper interrelations between its parts.

This led me, at the time I started to design the "Music Center and Library", to think first about the **square** and not the building itself. All decisions regarding the volume of the building, its height and the material used for its construction were derived from the spirit of **the square**, meaning from the larger system it had to be integrated with, respect and enhance.

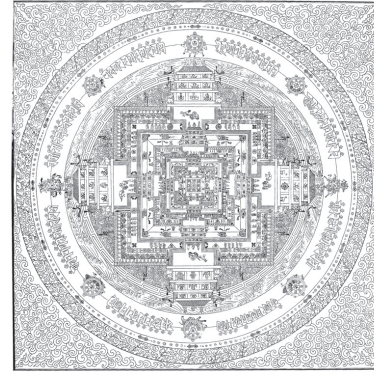




Another analogy for the organic relationship existing between the parts and the whole is the Mandala. The Mandala is a model that represents processes occurring in nature where there is always a center of energy feeding the parts around it. However, the very existence of this center of energy

is dependent on the existence of the parts around it.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama claims that understanding these expressions of dependent



arising, cause and condition, and cause and effect, is the condition for the realization of emptiness, which is the foundation of all Buddhist teaching. In his book *The Joy of Living and Dying in Peace* he writes: "The teaching of dependent arising has vast implications. In general, everything comes into existence in dependence on other factors and conditions....Since things arise and come into existence in accordance with their causes, the Buddhist scriptures contain no presentation of a self. When we accept that everything is conditional, it is logical that we cannot accept an independent creator of the universe...and that any entity has an intrinsic existence that comes into existence independently of many factors..." He goes on saying "Everything that is composed from parts, or conditioned by causes and conditions, is impermanent and fleeting. Things do not stay forever. They continually disintegrate. This kind of 'subtle impermanence' is confirmed by scientific findings in disciplines like cosmology, neurobiology, psychology, and particle physics, disciplines that are the result of generations of scientific investigations. Their findings are closely related to Buddhist teachings."

This concept of interdependence and continuity was presented in a public talk given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in which he noted: "The construction of the whole is caused continually by the disintegration of its parts. For example, the butter lamp as a whole is a source of light due to the melting of the butter. The melting of the butter is caused by the heat produced by the lamp".

# The "Music Center and Library" - A dialogue between a new building and an existing historical environment

The Bialik district is a unique district in the historic heart of Tel-Aviv, with Bialik Square at its center named after the Israel's national poet, Chaim Nachman Bialik, whose house is located on one of its corners. It is a micro-document of the architectural history of Tel-Aviv from 1920 to 1930. It was in the 1920's when European architecture was brought to Israel, carried out by Jewish refugee architects who immigrated to Israel from Europe, trying to become integrated with the local oriental architecture- thus named the "Eclectic period". This lasted until the 1930's when the new 'International Style' took over, the Bauhaus, a style that was the "dernier cri".

left:  
The Eclectic  
period,  
H.N.Bialik  
residence,  
Bialik Square,  
Tel Aviv.



International  
style, house on  
Idelson Street,  
Tel Aviv, Israel.



International  
Style, house on  
Hess Street,  
Tel Aviv, Israel.



The nature of their work until the mid 1930's, as opposed to the Bauhaus that was imported to Israel as a package deal, stemmed from a balance between their affinity to the land of Israel and their knowledge and love of it, and the use of cross-cultural and cross-national patterns brought by them from their European countries of origin. They consciously attempted to create a new "Israeli architecture"

integrating East and West. They understood that it was precisely that connection with the **local** reality in which they lived and created, which could bring out the universal. A reality which was broad and complex and embodied landscapes, architecture and local lifestyle. This approach was different from the **self-deprecating way** taken by the contemporary post-Zionist artists, for whom the love of Israel, the recognition of its existence and the creation of a unique art with an **Israeli identity** became almost derogatory words. They would do almost anything just in order to pass the low but assured threshold of the International world in general and the European one in particular. This attitude of denying the unique cultural heritage and traditional sources we are lucky to have in Israel is apparently still quite in force. Furthermore, the difference between the import of an International style to Israel, as opposed to the emergence of the Eclectic architecture from within the place, cannot be explained in the common simplistic way as an adaptation or the rejection of a **formal language**. These are two different worldviews. In other words, the transition from Eclectic architecture, at times mistakenly named "Oriental Style", to "International Style", which truly appears different in form, is not a shift from one **stylistic** principle to another. Such a distinction does an injustice to the difference existing between these two styles of architecture. The use of patterns such as entrance hall, arches, column capitals, differentiating a certain space with a dome to emphasize an important space and differentiate it from the rest, or an arcade at the front of a building used by architects in the Eclectic period, was not a matter **of style**. They understood in a most profound way (consciously or subconsciously) what are the fundamentals of harmony in architecture, the timeless cross-cultural patterns which underlines the beauty and comfort in any building that transcends styles. .

On the design of the dome in the Ruppin residence, its architect Eliezer Yellin wrote: "The domes are to signify the importance [of a room] as soon as one approaches the building ..." evidently this pattern of entrance hall, an arch, a capital in



Science  
Museum (Old  
Technion  
building), Haifa,  
architect  
Alexander  
Browald, 1910.  
↓

the column, an arcade or a dome, can be found in buildings of all periods: in the beautiful buildings designed by architect Frank Lloyd Wright during the late 19th and early 20th century in the United States; in the mosques built in the Ottoman period in the 14th and 15th centuries in Asia and in the buildings built during the 1920's and 1930's in Israel.



Bayzid Pasa  
(14th-15th  
century),  
Amasya,  
Turkey.

bottom:  
Rosenbaum  
house,  
Riverview  
Dr, Florence,  
Alabama, Frank  
Lloyd Wright,  
1939.

These patterns were on purpose ignored by the modernists (in general), which resulted in the creation of a physical environment devoid of any emotions and meaning.

The loss of a sense of identity in architecture and art is a worldwide phenomenon. There is no difference between contemporary buildings built in Beijing, New York, Barcelona or Tel Aviv. Therefore, I would confidently argue that the end of the Eclectic architecture period in Israel was the end of what may be defined as a **unique Israeli architecture**, architecture that stemmed out of the local reality.

The same provincality which led to the creation of the superimposed Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao which was certainly not generated by a Spanish reality, led to the design of the Chords Bridge in Jerusalem and the current new addition to the Museum of Modern Art in Tel-Aviv. This of course is only a partial list.

The Eclectic architecture is not a matter of nostalgia, but a reminder that there is a different kind of architecture we must pay attention to over and over again. Especially at a time when buildings are created according to ever changing and arbitrary fashions, we must be aware of an architecture that possesses a timeless quality, which by definition is appropriate for today. When creating the new-emptying the bath of water, let's not loose the baby with it

The "Music Center and Library" on Bialik Square was built **in 1996 on an empty site** where before stood the Shenkar residence, built in 1931 and **demolished completely by the Tel Aviv municipality in 1994.**

My intention was to design a building that would integrate organically with the square.

Preserving the spirit of a historical environment does not necessarily mean a fanatic repetition of its language. The key question I asked myself while standing in the square was, what would be the right language that would create a dialogue between the new contemporary building I design, and the historical square, that will preserve and enhance the spirit of the square, which is so human and so right. I adopted none of the conventional approaches; I was not trying to reconstruct the past nor was I trying to disassociate myself from it by using an architectural language that would impose an entirely new order. Alternatively, I considered any means which I could identify as having the capacity to create and enhance the dialogue.



The empty lot on which the Music Center and Library was built. (before construction, 1994).



My commission was to design a new building incorporating in the new plans a small segment of the façade of the old demolished one.

My conception was that similarly to removing one part of the human body, once you demolish a building and reconstruct just one isolated architectural element of it, it would become a **meaningless fragment**, for it would no longer be an organic part of the whole, and as such would not serve the initial purpose of preserving the old. Thus, what I tried to do, was to treat the reconstructed part as any other environmental element (trees, surrounding buildings) that needed to be naturally integrated with the newly designed building to form one coherent functional-visual whole.

The front façade facing the square (the reconstructed part that was integrated in the design of the new building is highlighted in grey).



The powerful presence of the building in the square emanates from it being an integral part of it, and not from the efforts to distinguish it from its environment.

The façade of the building defines the boundaries of the square, and therefore determines the feeling it inspires.

This intimate and organic integration created between the "Music Center and Library" building and the square, to the point where people tend to (mistakenly) think that the building has stood there forever was the result of several basic reasons:

- a. The dimensions of the building are in harmony with the human scale of the square.

- b. The orange paint of the building's façade, which at first was expected to disturb the tranquility of the square, was actually the element that complemented the blue color of the sky and the green color of the trees, to create a harmony that inspired peace and serenity in the square.
- c. The cornices that jut out of the façade, belong morphologically both to the building and to the space next to it, and hence are the elements that unite them together.



- d. At the front, where the building touches the square, an entrance porch was designed as a stage for the orchestra to play to the audience sitting in the square, thus creating a physical and human connection between the building and the square.
- e. The dialogue between the building and the square continues through the high windows behind which all the indoor "public" areas are located, as well as from the roof terrace overlooking the square.



- f. The crown on top of the building provides a gradual link to the sky. A good boundary is an entity that both separates and connects two entities at the same time. The role of the crown is to provide a graduated link between the top of the building to the sky.

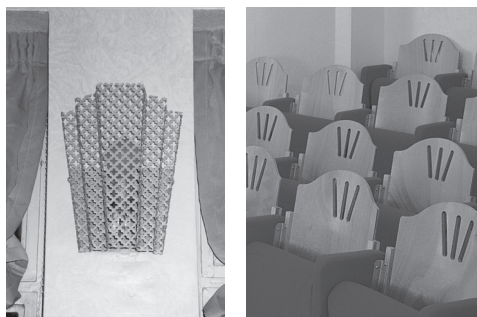
←  
Watercolor, simulation of the Music Center and Library on Bialik Square.



# The beauty is in the details

## The detail is not an ornamental for its own sake

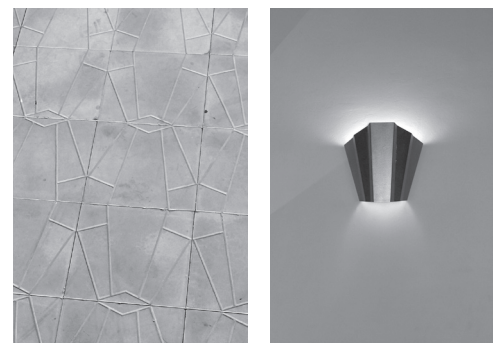
The secret concealed within the beauty of a building as a whole lies in its spatial order and in the nature of its details. I do not perceive the details of a building as a collection of designed elements but as a structural segment derived from a hierarchical language in which the square, the building and the interior are regarded as one continuous system. Each specific detail is derived from the larger whole to which it belongs, for whose existence it is responsible, and which it seeks to enhance. Therefore, each detail - including the design of the furniture, the light fixtures and the choice of color of the flowers in the garden - is an inseparable part of my planning process in the course of creating a unique "whole" for each building. Taking for example the auditorium, the details are what **create** the auditorium.



The lighting and the chair are part of the details that create the auditorium.

The similarity in form between the details, like the shape of the crown on top of the building, the patterns on the cement tiles on the entrance porch, the patterns on the fences surrounding the lot, the shape of the chairs in the auditorium and the shape

of the light fixtures, all of which I designed, are all echoes of the same note.



In modern society, beauty has become a term of abuse, often associated with inefficiency, impracticality, lack of functionalism and high cost. That notion of beauty is true when it relates to details as decorative elements and ornamentation for its own sake.

The Shakers, a religious sect that created an abundance of useful furniture and utensils in the mid-



eighteenth century, noted that the wholeness and beauty of form are products of pure functionalism, and that there is no room for beautiful forms that do not flow from a functional need.

At the same time however, the Shakers did not interpret the term "pure functionalism" in the narrow sense of the word as did the modernists, for whom the expression "form follows function" was semantically connected only to the physical body of the building. They understood it in the broad sense, connecting it both to the physical and spiritual experience one feels inside a building. This is the experience I want to create for the users of the buildings I design.

I implemented this broader definition when I designed the "Music Center and Library". For example: the wall separating the entrance lobby from the auditorium would be expected to be solid. However I chose it to be in glass in order to be able to see through it as one enters the building and enjoy the view across the auditorium of the orange trees in the back garden.

The six silver painted iron columns that rise from all the floors of the building are structural. However their precise location was determined by me, by the way they would help define the boundaries of the public territory at the front of each floor. In other words, the structural layout of the building followed the social activities on the floors.

The gold leaves capital of the iron column, the part which connects it to the beam, is functionally different from the other parts of the column and was **therefore** given a different form and color.

The iron balustrades of the stairs and the auditorium are painted gold, providing a melody of its own. When the sunrays hit these decorated iron balustrades they create beautiful silhouettes on the various surfaces.

The interior walls are painted in silver texturing. The soft reflection of the light when it touches the walls creates an inner glow that envelops all parts of the building.

←  
The shape of the crown and lighting, the pattern of the cement tile at the entrance, and the railing wall reliefs, are all echoes of one voice.

right:  
The location of the iron columns is drawn from the activity areas within the building, contribute to defining their areas.



# The generative language of the building

## Beauty as an objective matter

Alexander bases his work on the assumption that beauty and harmony are objective properties related to the geometrical properties inherent in the structure itself, and that feelings are an objective fact. Accordingly in his book *The Timeless Way of Building* he states that all places of organic order that may seem unplanned and disorderly are actually a clear expression of order on a deep and complex level. This order is based on absolute rules that have always determined the quality and beauty of a place and is the source of the good feeling in it. In other words, there is a direct connection between the pattern of events that occur in a place and the physical patterns - patterns of space in his terminology - that constitute it.

This assumption led Alexander and his team to an empirical research, conducted at The Center for Environmental Structure in Berkeley California, with the aim to explore two primary questions:

- What is the nature of the spatial order present in places that make us feel good?
- What planning process is required to create an environment that possesses that same organic order?

Organic order can be achieved when all those participating in the planning process share a common language. In the past this language evolved out of tradition, when everyone knew exactly what should be done. Nowadays, a time of confused pathways, there is a need to revive a language that will restore order and wholeness in the environment.

If we take for example three places like the Piazza San Marco in Venice, La Piazza del Campo in Siena,

Del Campo  
Square, Sienna,  
Italy.



Washington  
Square,  
New York.



or Washington Square in New-York, we may note that the events and what we feel in these places are similar, however they differ in form.

This phenomenon gave rise to the hypothesis, that beyond what appears different, there is something else, much more basic and common to them all.

An empirical research conducted in the mid 1960 for over a decade by Alexander and his team at 'The Center for Environmental Structure' in Berkeley California, aimed to analyze all those places that share a common pattern of events and feel similar, in order to identify the common element.

Their basic assumption was that just as every substance has a basic component called an atom, the man-made environment consists of "atoms" which he called patterns. Each pattern is an archetype of a structure that repeats itself in an infinite variety, and although its form varies from place to place, there is an underlying structure - the archetype which remains the same.

San Marco  
Square, Venice,  
Italy.





Let's take for example the pattern called 'Arcade' - an archetype of a structure that relates to the transition area between a building and the open space around it. Although the arcade in the synagogue I designed in Hadera is different from the one in the old cloister in Assisi or in the Senior Citizens Day Center I designed in Tel-Aviv, there is one superstructure common to them all, a superstructure that defines the repeating **relationship** between the building and its surroundings.

The use of the pattern 'Arcade'.  
The Maimonides Central Sephardic Synagogue, Hadera (Designed by Nili Portugali).



The use of the pattern 'Arcade'.  
Senior Citizens Day Center, Tel-Aviv (Designed by Nili Portugali).



The use of the pattern 'Arcade'.  
San Damiano Cloister; Assisi.

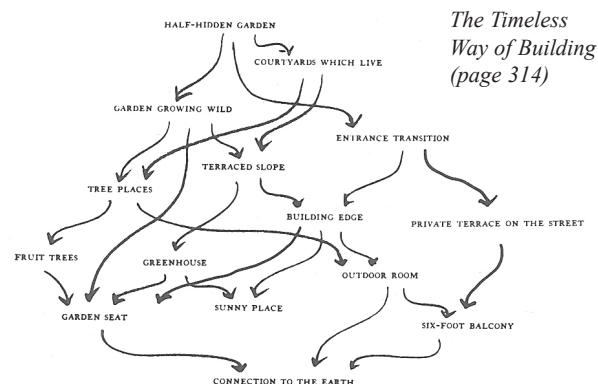


Another example: When we come across an African tree we have never seen before, we do recognize it as a tree. The reason for that is that, because the entity we identify as a 'tree' is not the visible form, but the underlying structure, the relationship between the parts of a tree. And although form repeats itself in an infinite variety, the pattern of relationship

remains the same.



The importance of these patterns, 250 in number as listed by Alexander in his book, *A Pattern Language*, lies in the fact that they constitute a system which generates an **entire language**. It includes patterns from the city scale level to that of individual buildings and construction details. Each pattern in the language consists of other smaller patterns and is at the same time part of a larger pattern. In other words, each pattern is a **pattern of relationships**. The language is a generative one and the hierarchical order of the patterns it consists of, is determined by the rules of the language itself.



What ultimately creates a meaningful house, a street or a city is similar to what gives meaning to a sentence in the spoken language, which is the syntax.

If we take for example the pattern called 'covered walkway', whose function in the larger system is to connect buildings, an entire set of smaller patterns - the height of the roof, the distance between the columns, the building materials, etc. - will immediately emerge and help create it.



Since the environment consists of patterns that produce a common experience, the relevant question is: what lies behind the **specific** patterns identified to produce the feeling of comfort **we all share** no matter what culture or place we come from.

According to the linguist Noam Chomsky, in the various spoken languages there is a common structural element he calls the language of languages or the underlying patterns. It is an element that is innate in human beings and therefore common to us all (which explains why children can so easily

learn a foreign language. Likewise Alexander's assumption is, that in the physical space, there are patterns that reflect an innate pattern structured in our brain, which is the cause for the similar feelings different people share in any given place.

The first step in the planning process is to determine the patterns of space that are relevant to the project. Some of them will stem from the specific context of the project and the cultural reality of the place, patterns that vary from place to place, and some from the more basic needs common to us all as human beings in any place, building and culture and which are, therefore, invariant. For example, natural daylight is essential for the mental and physical wellbeing of all human beings whether in a senior citizen's center or in a kindergarten, whether in India or in Israel.

The language is a generative one and the hierarchical order of the patterns it consists of is determined by the rules of the language itself. So once I decide on the list of patterns that are relevant to a specific project, a set of interrelations between them is automatically created defining the relationships among the different components of the building. As in any organic system, the genetic codes regulate not only the functioning of the cell but ensure their relations to the organism as a whole, in this case to the building as a whole.



# The planning process and the spirit of the square

The planning process proposed here is fundamentally different from the common planning processes. Unlike the common planning processes, where planning first takes place in the office and is later transferred to the site, here the drawings are merely the recordings of the planning decisions taken on the site itself.

The plan of the building that is finally created is actually a structure of balance between the abstract pattern language chosen for the project and the living reality of the actual site, a reality that differs from site to site.

Once I set a list of patterns for the project, in this case for the "Music Center and Library", all planning decisions concerning the physical structure of the building are literally taken on the site itself.

I physically mark every decision that was taken on the site with wooden stakes. Each of these marks is in fact another definition in the development of the building layout.

Planning decisions taken on the site, are becoming the actual building.



Students of Nili Portugali practicing a design process on the actual site.



Unlike the common planning process where the shape of the building is predetermined with no relation to the site, and later superimposed on the site, here a dynamic process took place by which the plan of the building that was finally created was a structure of balance between the abstract pattern language chosen for the project and the living reality (a reality that differs from site to site).





The unpredictable conditions that are continuously developing on the actual site, create openings for new things. The order according to which the planning decisions are taken on the site is determined by the hierarchical order in which the planning patterns appear on my list governed by the rules - the syntax of the pattern language itself. And like in the spoken language where the order of the words is what gives the sentence its meaning, the meaning of the plans is generated by the order in which the patterns are applied.

Decisions are first made on issues that affect the larger scale we have to confront at any given moment along the development of the plan, moving to other decisions generated from them.



↑ →

The location of the gate was determined and marked on site. Ben Avraham Residence, Zichron Yaakov (Designed by Nili Portugali).



A traditional pattern of "Entrance gate", Safed. (left)

The gate was planned between two existing eucalyptus trees, Senior Citizens Day Center, Tel Aviv (Designed by Nili Portugali).



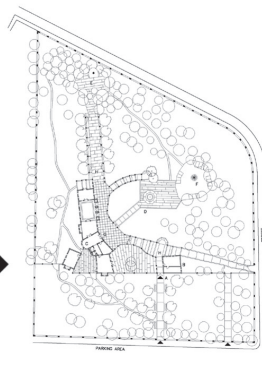
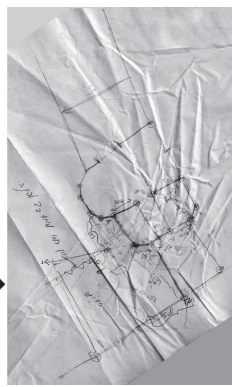
For example: when I started the design of The Music Center and Library, the square was the

larger whole existing which I had to relate to at that moment. First I had to make a decision about the location of the main "gate" to my site, the threshold connecting my site and the square as a whole. This was a critical decision and not an obvious one when keeping in mind contemporary architecture in places such as: the diamond stock exchange district in Ramat Gan or along Shaul Hamelech Boulevard in Tel Aviv or any other office district in the world where pedestrians spend a lot of time looking for the main entrance to a building - they literally get lost. I walked up Idelson Street and then along Bialik Street towards the square. I tried to physically feel where the exact spot along the boundary of the site would immediately be visible once the square comes into sight. **This** spot was where I placed the "gate".



The planning process was not conceived as an additive process, but rather as a **differentiating** one similar to the development of an embryo. Each new element of the plan was differentiated gradually from the previous ones. Each decision taken on the site and marked on the ground actually changed the configuration of the site as a whole. The new whole (configuration) that was created and fully visualized on the site at any stage, formed the basis for the next decision.

The final "layout" that emerged on the site was measured and recorded by a surveyor. Experience has taught me that decisions which may sometimes appear irregular and strange on paper, often make sense in reality (where it comes from), and vice versa. A plan that appears perfect on paper (where it was created) may seem senseless on the site. So, if when looking at the "stakes plan" doubts arise concerning one or more of the decisions taken on the site, the correction is not made on paper in the office, but checked again on the site itself. The final "stakes plan" forms the basis for the final plan.



Planning decisions taken and marked on the ground materialize on the actual building plan.

Organic architecture should not be conceived as a personal and arbitrary vision of the architect. Organic architecture involves a state of awareness and a capacity for capturing the actual reality operating **on the site**, independent of the architect's vision. Let us not be mistaken, a creative process which feeds on what is felt to be there and is inspired by it, is definitely not a passive one. We are talking about a complex process where we have to be constantly aware in order to discover and identify the visible as well as the hidden forces on the site, in order for us, the planners, to be able to revive them.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama refers in his book *The Joy of living and Dying in Peace* to that existing reality to which our work must relate to, by saying: " One aspect of the process is first to know that things have a natural and innate mode of existence.....Reality is not something that the mind has fabricated anew. Therefore, when we search for the meaning of truth, we are searching for reality, for the way things actually exist. This is called the logic of suchness, which means that we investigate things on the basis of their suchness or nature.... We need to be able to distinguish between the mere clarity of the mind and those aspects that appear when extraneous factors such as attachment arise".

When I arrive on a site the questions have already been clearly formulated, but the search for

**the answers** to these questions is done on the site itself.

Each planning decision is the product of a direct experiencing of all the forces operating on the site, including the directions of the light, the view, the buildings and the paths around, the topographical structure of the land, etc. The decisions are taken intuitively, since intuition is the only means of experiencing the environment as a whole entity.

Unlike common planning processes, where everything is predetermined, this is a process whereby the plan of the building develops gradually from the interaction of the abstract planning patterns and the unpredictable situations developing on the site. This is a process that frees us from using arbitrary preconceived images stored in our minds that are irrelevant to the evolution of the plan, and as a result allows us to open our minds to new things.

The process of working on the site itself allows me to be carried away with the reality **there**, and is essential in order to be free of preconceived images I saw in other places, which de facto are irrelevant to the development of the building layout on the specific site I am working on.

Eugen Herrigel, a German professor of philosophy who spent the period between the two world wars in Tokyo, exploring Zen Buddhism through practicing the art of archery, quotes in his book *Zen in the Art of Archery*, his Zen master who taught him what state of mind is required for an archer to successfully hit the target. "Drawing the bow and loosing the shot happens independently of the Archer. The hands must open like the skin of a ripe fruit. The Archer must let himself go to the point that the only thing that is left of him is a **purposeless** tension (....) At this state of mind, being released from all attachments, art should be practiced"

At this state of mind, architecture should be practiced.

# The connection between modern technology and tradition

## Why everyone thinks (mistakenly) that the building is a reconstruction and not a new one, actually built on an empty lot in 1996?

One of the assumptions that immediately arises regarding the "Music Center and Library", as well as with other buildings I design, is that the building that was actually built in 1996 is not a new one but rather a "preservation" or "reconstruction" of a building of the past that had stood there much before. The fact that it feels as if it has been in the square forever makes me feel good as this is exactly what I was trying to achieve; to build a building that is organically integrated with the square and not alien to it. This assumption is based without any doubt, on what we see around us, new buildings that "bark" at their surroundings and are alien to it. Consequently people assume that a building that gives a pleasant feeling of comfort and is integrated in a natural way with its surroundings, cannot possibly be a new building. This reality is the result of the iconic architecture, which has knowingly attempted to dissociate itself from the spirit of the place.

Furthermore, when they finally discover that the "Music Center and Library" (as well as the other buildings I designed) are in fact new ones built on an empty lot, the next immediate questions I am asked in reaction is "to what **style** does it belong? Is it a new design that tries to reconstruct an architectural language from the past?"

My answer to that is that I do not attempt or aim to reconstruct the past or to nostalgically trace this or that style. The similarity and the association created between the buildings I design and those we know from the past, and the similar experience and feeling of 'a home' they create, originate in my use of the same fundamental **patterns, planning codes and planning processes** that were the guidelines in the past, and will continue to be so in the future, in any culture and tradition, where people aspire to give a building **spirit and soul**, bringing to the front of the agenda the human value. These codes and 'art of making' that have been brutally ignored (in general) by contemporary architecture, I try to revive and implement in the buildings I design in relation to the physical, cultural and social context of the place I am working on.

The architectural approach which aims at fulfilling timeless values is by no means a reaction against the contemporary movement as one might think. On the contrary, it is a genuine attempt to fully use the potential inherited in modern technological society available today, not as an aim or a value in itself, but as a **tool** to create a human and friendly environment that will satisfy the basic needs common to all of us as human beings. Especially at a time where unlimited possibilities are open to us, technology should be used in a controlled, value-oriented and moral way when approaching the design of the physical environment in which we live.

Moreover, the 'trademarks' we have become accustomed to and which are currently used as 'sustainable development', 'green building', 'ecological environment' and the likes, are no more than a list of dogmatic rules that refer to the saving of energy, water and electricity and the recycling of materials. Without reducing their importance, surprisingly there is no reference at all in the list to what should be considered as the central environmental resource, the **human being**. This results in buildings that look like machines (to say the least), and which are alienated to their physical environment and far from being friendly to their users.

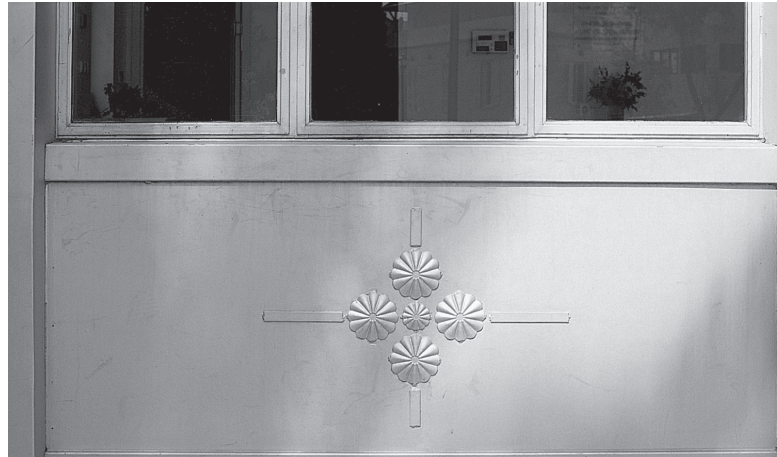
The terms "sustainable development" and "green building" thus require a broader definition than the one currently in use, as well as a change of priorities. It must call for the basic needs (body and soul) of the **human being** for whom the environment is being built. What is good for the human being will necessarily be good for the environment and will consequently reduce cost and save energy. For example, any human being, whether in his house or at work needs to have natural daylight, for his physical and his mental wellbeing. So as soon as **the human experience** is brought to the front of the agenda, saving energy will inevitably follow. In the past, the rule of thumb dictated design processes generated from the daily experience. For example the use of thick walls to



isolate houses from heat and cold reduced the need (and cost) of heating and air-conditioning; so did the attention put on the exact location of windows in relation to wind and light and the use of wind balconies to cool down the house. The work was

done without " trademarks " or slogans, because what filled the architect's vision was the human being's experience for which the building was made for.

Industrial iron  
panels with  
flower  
ornaments.





# Concluding notes

## The relationship between values and facts - A new paradigm and the concept of "One Value"

Alexander claims that in present cosmology which co-exists with the mechanistic worldview, as was first outlined by Descartes, there is no place for **ethical** questions or inquiry into the nature of order underlying the beauty of a building or the quality he names "the quality without a name".

He believes that the point of view which enables us to study and discover the nature of the physical universe is incomplete, and in a sense completely wrong. He claims that it is possible to construct a different worldview, one that does address the question of "order" and "meaning" and includes questions which so far have been left aside by science. Points of view where the nature of order in architecture (as presented in Alexander's books) will not be an issue separated from physics, biology, etc., but rather a fulcrum for ideas that will cause radical changes in the way of thinking. Just like physics served and shaped the worldview in the 19th and 20th centuries, a new and revolutionary understanding of questions related to the nature of the order constructing space, will serve the worldview of the 21st and 22nd centuries in understanding the physical world in general.

In his book '*Christopher Alexander, The Search for a New Paradigm in Architecture*', Stephen Garbow calls Alexander's new way a paradigm. He writes that the overlap between beauty, truth and comfort is, of course, an ancient idea, however Alexander arrived at it in an unprecedented way, even by a mathematical method which sets him apart with his predecessor. Thomas Kuhn in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* saw in the ability to be precise about reality, a decisive element in the paradigm shift, based on the belief that this reality exists independently of our knowledge of it.

An even stricter argument put by Alexander was that there is **one** central value underlying that same timeless quality, a value he calls *The One or The Great Self*. He believes that every human being is connected to this value and is able to get connected with it by awakening his consciousness. The direct relationship with this One value in the

creative process is the common ground we all share as architects and artists.

This basic assumption was strongly criticized in the mid 1970's by people whose work was associated with the positivistic school of thought which adopts the mechanistic approach. An approach supported by scientists like Churchman and Rittel from Berkeley University who claimed that as the world of values is personal (subjective), there are differences in the value systems among different cultures, and therefore there is no reconciliation possible with one basic value, other than through conflict and compromise. Any attempt to argue for One value would be a racist coercion which disrespects cultural differences.

Alexander's response was that such criticism is based on a mistaken hypothesis where facts are related to one realm of existence, known as science, while values belong to another. Before the Cartesian world of thinking it was natural to believe that the perception of the universe, as scientific as it may be, included the **observer**, and therefore had to embody **feelings**. The demand for One value is based on the notion that every human being will get closer to the nature of his being. As human beings are basically structured from the same elements, getting closer to the "Self" as opposed to the "Ego" will generate similarities and strengthen relationships between people. Hence, the One Value approach does recognize the fact that people come from different cultures and identities.

The great masterpieces in Art and Architecture evolved throughout history from societies that drew their strength from their cultural and spiritual (religious) traditions and the place they belonged to. Precisely these sources, which one would have expected to be the cause of division between cultures and nations, turned out to be the actual link that created harmony between them. The tree symbolizing "life" in the Kabala appears as a symbol for life in the Tantra art; the red thread worn by Tibetans on their wrist for luck, is put on the carriages of newborn babies in the Jewish tradition;

The Wishing tree is found both in the cemetery in Safed and at the entrance to a shrine in Japan.



The wishing tree, cemetery, Safed.



The wishing tree, China (photo by Tianji Zhao).

By applying a planning process such as the one presented in this book which attempts to consider the uniqueness that exists in every culture, society and site, and at the same time to promote the use of universal codes we all share as human beings, it is my hope that a holistic worldview will prevail. A holistic worldview whose essence is cross cultures, will link them together in harmony. This will lead us collectively to create buildings, streets, neighborhoods, cities and villages that we **really** want to live in. To the hub of this universal approach and to this timeless 'art of making' we all humans could be connected to, if only we wanted to.

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# Appendix

## Biography

Nili Portugali was born in Haifa, Israel in 1948. She is a 7th generation descendant of a family (Berenson) who lives in the holy city of Safed since the early 19th century and the grandchild of Dr. Nissan Kahan, founder of the Zionist movement in Hungary.

She is a practicing architect working in Israel for more than 38 years. She was a senior lecturer at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Architectural Department, Jerusalem and was teaching at the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning at the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa. Her teaching topics include: The holistic - phenomenological approach to architecture in Theory and Practice; the foundations of harmony in Architecture & Art; the architectural Pattern language; the nature of the spatial order; the design process; the phenomena of colors.

Her work focuses on both practice and theory, and is closely connected with the holistic-phenomenological school of thought

Her firm deals with a variety of projects in the domains of Architecture, Urban Design, Landscape Design and Interior Design within unique areas of historic or environmental sensitivity, in the realm of Public Buildings, Residential, and Mixed developments and Private houses

She is a graduate of the prestigious "Architectural



Association School of Architecture" (A.A.), London (1973). She did post graduate studies in Architecture and Buddhism at the University of California, Berkeley. She worked and participated in research with Prof. Christopher Alexander at the Center for Environmental Structure, Berkeley.

Portugali has won prizes in competitions. she is invited as guest lecturer to international conferences and leading universities all over the world. She participates in various exhibitions in Israel and abroad. She has published many articles on architecture and her work is documented in professional magazines, in the press and on television.

Her first published book: Nili Portugali /*The Act of Creation and the Spirit of Place: A Holistic-Phenomenological Approach to Architecture*/ Edition Axel Menges Stuttgart-London 2006 was among the 24 books selected by the Royal Institute of British Architects (R.I.B.A) International Book Award for the year 2007.

She has recently completed the script for a Feature Documentary film which she will direct and Art direct: "And the alley she whitewashed in light blue". In this film she will implement all the body of knowledge and experience she has accumulated in her 38 years of multidisciplinary creative work in the visual arts & architecture, her main occupation.

## Competitions awards & entries

1. Memorial Site for The Fallen Intelligence Servicemen community, Gilot, purchase prize, 1982
2. Residential Houses in Community Villages, Ideas competition, purchase prize, 1984
3. The Sephardic Central Synagogue, Hadera, first prize, 1988
4. The city of villas, Rishon Lezion, first prize, 1988
5. House for the elderly, Rishon Lezion, 1988
6. Jewish Comprehensive School, Berlin, 1990
7. Civic Center, Or Akiva, 1994
8. Community Center for The Israeli Defense Army Veterans, Ramat Gan, first prize, 1995
9. The Israel National War Memorial Center, Mount Eitan, Jerusalem, 1995
10. Residential neighborhood, Kfar Yona, 1999



11. The Central city library, Haifa, 1999
12. Day center for the Aged, Eilat 2000
13. Student Dormitories, Technion Institute of Technology, Haifa, 2000
14. Day center for the Aged, Hadera, 2002
15. Tele medicine health & community center, Sanfe Bagar, Nepal, 2007
16. Nili Portugali / *The Act of Creation and the*

*Spirit of Place: A Holistic-Phenomenological Approach to Architecture* / Edition Axel Menges 2006, was among the 24 books selected by the Royal Institute of British Architects International Book Award for the year 2007.

17. Residential neighborhood in the Kibbutz & Ohel-Shem Community & School library, World Architecture Community Awards Shortlist, 2008

## Selected publications about "The Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library" building

### In books, journals and the daily press

#### In Hebrew:

1. *Ha'ir Tel Aviv*, November 21st; 1993, December 26th; 1996, March 21st; 1997
2. *Haaretz*, February 10th, 1994, November 28th, 1996
3. *Mivnim*, No 140, May 1994
4. *Yediot*, Zman Tel Aviv, December 8th, 1995
5. *Camalot*, January 1997
6. *Merchav 2000*, The First Biennale for Architecture. The Architects Association, Israel, 1997
7. *Atmosfera*, El Al Journal No 78, April/May/June 1998
8. *Globes*, 'Globes Design' supplement, No 36, June 1998
9. *Engineers and Architects*, September/October 1998
10. *Israeli Architecture*, No 53, May 2003
11. Shapira Yoni, *The Mini Israel Guide*, Mini Israel Publishing, 2003
12. Vidrich Shula, *Bialik the Street*, Porat Publishing, 2004
13. *Alpayim*, 29 (2005)
14. *Ma'ariv*, "Sofshavua", October 6th, 2006
15. *Globes*, "Concept", Design supplement, March 2007
16. *Ha'ir Tel Aviv*, "Psifas", Good Life & Design
17. *Haaretz*, "Designer" supplement No. 4, September 2008

#### International publications:

18. *The Third Bienal Internacional De Arquitetura De Sao Paulo Brazil*, Arquitetos do Brasil / Instituto de Publication, p. 318, 1997
19. Architectureweek, [www.architectureweek.com/2001/0404/design\\_1-1.html](http://www.architectureweek.com/2001/0404/design_1-1.html), April 2001

20. UIA Conference publication, Istanbul, 2005
21. [www.umbau-verlag.com/Neue\\_Dateien/HolisticApproach.pdf](http://www.umbau-verlag.com/Neue_Dateien/HolisticApproach.pdf), 2005
22. Portugali Nili, *The Act of Creation and the Spirit of a Place / A Holistic-Phenomenological Approach to Architecture*, Edition Axel Menges, Stuttgart / London 2006
23. *KBB Design*, July-August 2007
24. *World Architecture Magazine Publications*, Volume 219 Issue 9, September 2008
25. *Indian Architecture and Builder* Vol. 22, July 2009
26. <http://www.intbau.org/archive/essay11.htm>
27. [http://archnet.org/library/sites/one-site.tcl?site\\_id=11361](http://archnet.org/library/sites/one-site.tcl?site_id=11361)

#### Film Bibliography & Radio interviews:

28. *Israel Television BC, Channel 33*, "Vitrina", 1998
29. *Israel Television BC, Channel 33*, "Coffee and Theater", 2000
30. *Israel Television BC, Tevel Community Channel*, Tel Aviv 2000
31. *The National Radio & Television of Portugal*, March 2007 -
32. *Israel Television BC, Channel 08* April 2007
33. *Israel Television BC, Channel 1*, "Air Time", 2007
34. *Israel I.D.F Radio*, "Personal Questions with Ya'acov Agmon", August 1st, 2009
35. <http://ww1.rtp.pt/noticias/index.php?article=272688&visual=26>, March 2007

For the full Resume see: [www.niliportugali.com](http://www.niliportugali.com)

# Acknowledgements

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Maoz Azaryahu is professor of Cultural Geography in Haifa University, Israel.

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Tel Aviv-Yafo municipality and Irit Sheinhorn - Director of the "The Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library".

Last but not least, to all who made the publication of this book possible thanks to their generous support:

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Libraries Department, Culture and Arts Division, Tel Aviv-Yafo municipality

PITARO FURNITURE, Holon

**Pitaro** DRESS  
YOUR  
SPACE









Long distance view to Bialik Square (Hill) from The Steps Alley. (left)

מבט רחוק לכיכר (גבעת) ביאליק מכיוון סמטת המדרגות (שמאל).

The cornices sticking out from the building's façade are clearly as much part of the building and of the space around it, therefore they link the two.

הקרניזים במעטפת הבניין קושרים את הבניין לחלל שמסביבו.

The main entrance gate is to be clearly visible as soon as one enters the square and was determined accordingly.

מיקום השער הראשי נקבע במקום שנראה בבירור מיד בכניסה לכיכר.



Organic integration between the building of the Music Center and Library (1996) in the center and the historical square.

ההשתלבות האורגנית שבין "מרכז מוסיקה וספריה ע"ש פליציה בלומנטל" (1996), שבמרכז, לכיכר ההיסטורית.





View to the  
entrance terrace.  
מבט למרפסת  
הכניסה.



The details are  
the various  
echoes issuing  
from one voice,  
from the whole  
to which they  
belong.

הפרטים הם הדים  
שונים הבאים מקול  
צליל אחד, מהשלם  
שהם שייכים לו  
ושממנו הם נגזרים.





→

The exact placement of the six steel columns helps define the public areas.

המיקום המדויק של ששת עמודי הברזל מסייע להגדיר את תחום השטחים הציבוריים.

←

Sights from within the building towards the square create a dialogue between the two.

המבטים מפנים הבניין לכיכר יוצרים את הדיאלוג בין שניהם.



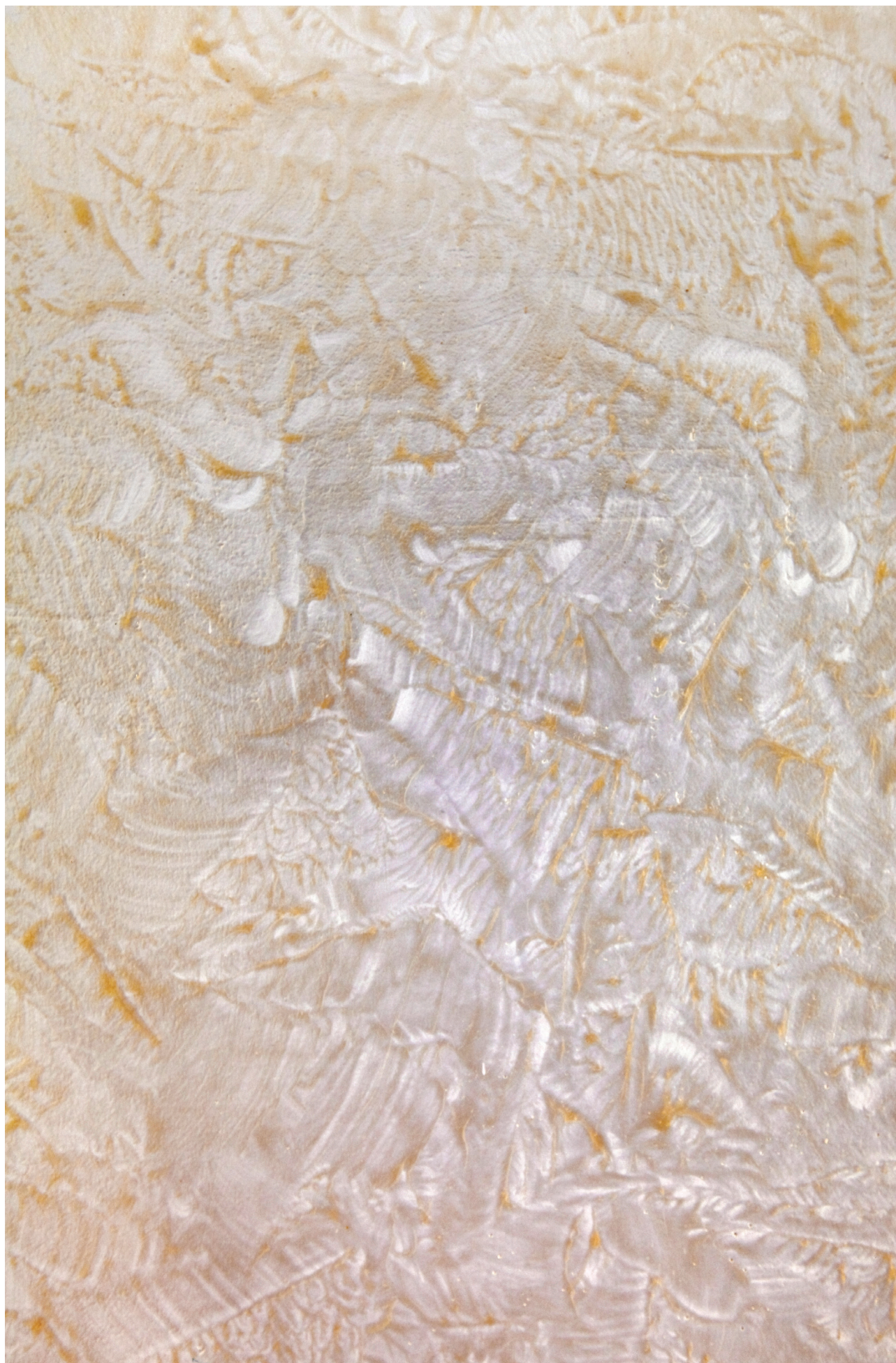


The form of the lighting was derived from the same language that created the other details of the building.

מבנה המנורה נגזר מאותה השפה שממנה נגזרו פרטי הבניין האחרים.







The auditorium is created by its details. The similarity in form between the ceiling, the glass wall, the gallery and the chairs stems from the common whole to which they belong.

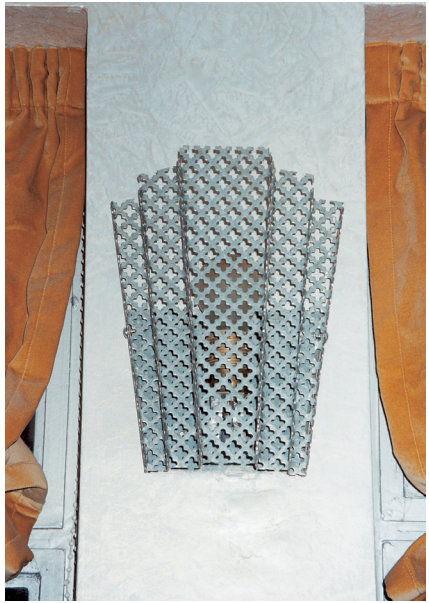
הפרטים יוצרים את האודיטוריום. הדמיון הצורני שבין התקרה, קיר הזכוכית, הגלריה והכיסאות נגזר מהשלם שאליו הם משתייכים.

→  
View towards the auditorium.  
מבט לאודיטוריום.

The textured gold color on the wall in the public areas distinguishes them from the rest of the spaces. When touched by sunrays they create a unique light in the open space.

מרקם הקירות המוזהב בשטחים הציבוריים מבדיל אותם משאר חלקי הבניין. המפגש עם קרני השמש מציף את החלל באור ייחודי.







Wide-open staircase provides a view to all the floors open to it.

גרם מדרגות רחב ופתוח מאפשר מבט לכל הקומות הנפתחות אליו.



The iron balustrades of the staircase provide a melody, thereby enhancing the feeling in the space.

פרט מעקה הברזל במדרגות מספק מנגינה ומעשיר את התחושה בחלל.









Lavatories.  
Hand drawn  
ceramic tiles.  
חדרי השירותים.  
אריחי קרמיקה  
מאוירים בציור יד.





Lending library.  
View to  
catalogues area  
and circulation  
desk.

ספריית השאלה.  
מבט לדלפק  
ההשאלה ולאזור  
הקטלוגים.





The museum, the study and periodicals room and the archives form one visual continuum.

המוזאון, חדר העיון וכתבי עת והארכיון הם רצף ויזואלי אחד.



Glass stained grapes at the edge of the upper window create a boundary that both connects and separates the glass and the wooden frame.

הענבים המוטבעים בזכוכית הם הגבול שמפריד את החלון מן המסגרת ובו בזמן מחבר ביניהם.



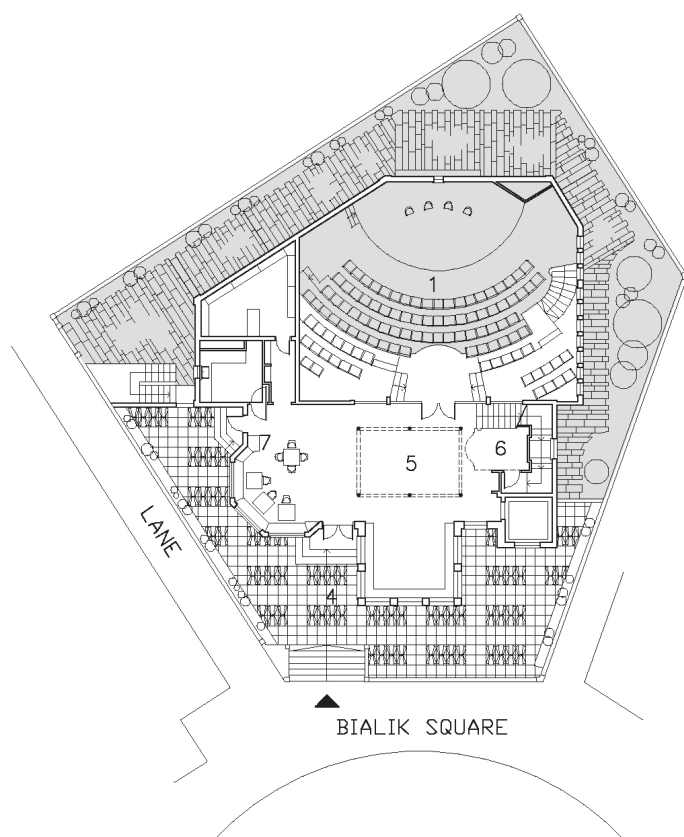


↑  
Study and  
periodicals  
room.  
חדר העיון  
וכתבי עת.

The design of  
the furniture  
was derived  
from the  
language of the  
space they  
complement.  
תכנון הרהיטים  
נגזר משפת החלל  
שאותה יוצרים.



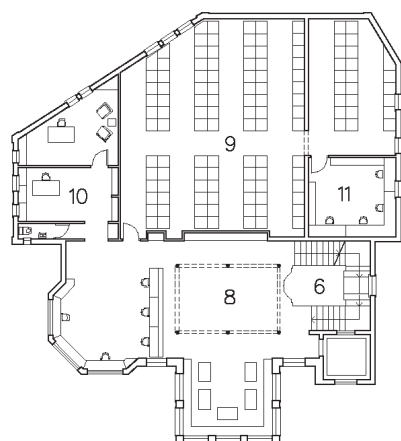




Site and ground floor plan

תוכנית מגרש וקומת קרקע

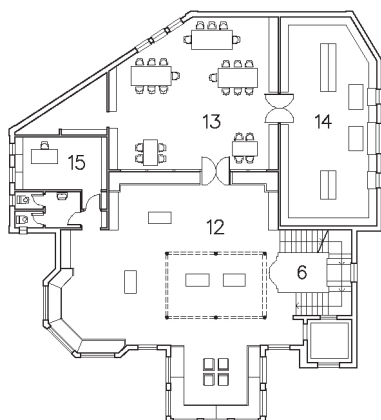
1. Auditorium - אודיטוריום
4. Entrance porch - מרפסת כניסה
5. Lobby - מבואה
6. Open staircase space - חלל מדרגות פתוח
7. Coffee place - קפה



First floor plan - lending library

תוכנית קומה ראשונה - קומת השאלה

8. Catalogues and circulation desk - דלפק השאלה וקטלוגים
9. Notes, scores, books - תווים, ספרים
10. Administration - משרדי הנהלה
11. Librarian's room - חדר ספרנים



Second floor plan

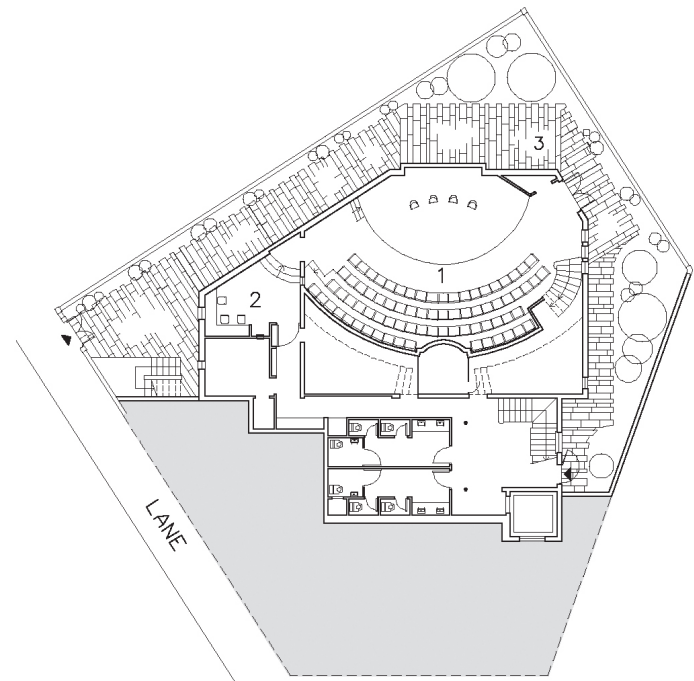
תוכנית קומה שנייה

12. Exhibition area - חלל תצוגה
13. Study and periodicals room - חדר עיון וכתבי עת
14. archives - ארכיון
15. Curator's room - חדר אוצרות



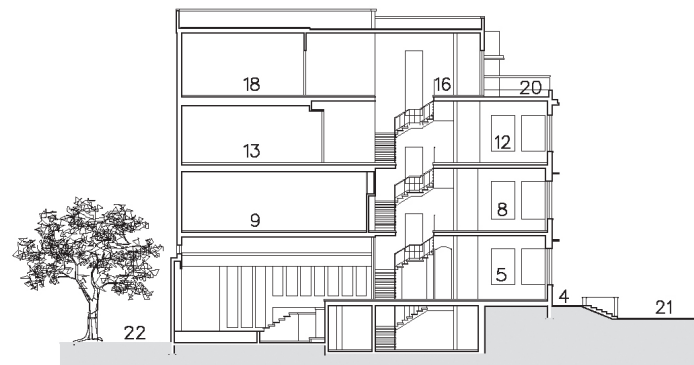
Lower ground floor plan  
תוכנית קומת מרתף

1. auditorium - אודיטוריום
2. Dressing room - חדר הלבשה
3. Back garden - גינה



Cross section. The square, the building and the back garden form one continuous whole

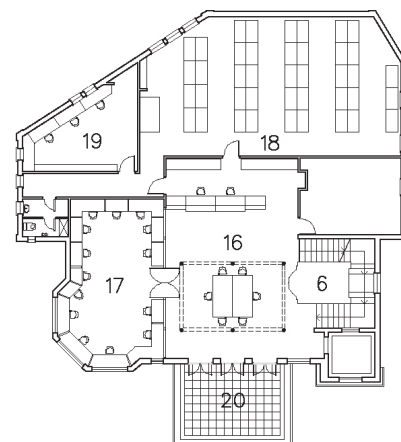
חתך רוחב. הכיכר, הבניין והגינה שמאחור הם רצף מתמשך אחד



Third floor plan - audiovisual library

תוכנית קומה שלישית - הספרייה האודאו-ויזואלית

16. Catalogues and circulation desk - דלפק השאלה וקטלוגים
17. Audiovisual room - חדר האזנה וצפייה
18. Discs, videotapes, records - דיסקים, קלטות ותקליטים
19. Librarians' room - חדר ספרנים
20. Roof terrace - מרפסת גג







The audiovisual room.  
חדר צפייה והאזנה.

View from the roof terrace towards the square (left).  
מבט ממרפסת הגג לכיכר (שמאל).



View from the  
audiovisual  
library towards  
the roof terrace  
overlooking the  
square and the  
sea.

מבט מהספרייה  
האודי-קולית לעבר  
מרפסת גג הצופה  
אל הכיכר ואל הים.

←  
The audiovisual  
library. The  
lending &  
catalogues area,  
the audiovisual  
room and the  
roof terrace,  
form one visual  
continuum.

הספרייה האודי-  
קולית, חלל  
ההשאלה, חדר  
הצפייה והאזנה,  
והמרפסת הם רצף  
ויזואלי אחד.







The design of the exhibition cabinets was derived from the language of the space they complement.

תכנון ארונות  
המוצגים נגזר  
משפת החלל  
שאותה יוצרים.



→  
Sights from  
within the  
building  
towards the  
square create a  
dialogue  
between the  
two.

המבטים מפנים  
הבניין לכיכר  
יוצרים את הדיאלוג  
בין שניהם.



←  
The museum  
floor.  
קומת המוזאון.

The design of  
the armchairs  
in the museum  
space, was  
derived from  
the language of  
the space they  
complement.

תכנון הכורסאות  
בחלל המוזאון  
נגזר משפת החלל  
שאותה יוצרים.







Tall windows by the open space of the staircase allow for sunlight to reach all parts of the building.

החלונות הגבוהים שבחלל המדרגות מחזירים אור שמש לכל חלקי הבניין.



The iron balustrades of the staircase provide a melody, thereby enhancing the feeling in the space.

פרט מעקה הברזל במדרגות מספק מנגינה ומעשיר את התחושה בחלל.





First floor. The catalogue area overlooking the square.

קומה ראשונה. אזור  
הקטלוגים צופה  
לכיכר.



The sights from inside the building towards the square create a dialogue between the two.

המבטים מקנים  
הבניין החוצה  
לכיכר יוצרים  
דיאלוג בין שניהם.





The details are the various echoes issuing from one voice, from the whole to which they belong and from which they are derived.

הפרטים הם הדפים  
שונים הבאים מקול  
צליל אחד, מהשלם  
שהם שייכים לו  
ושממנו הם נגזרים.



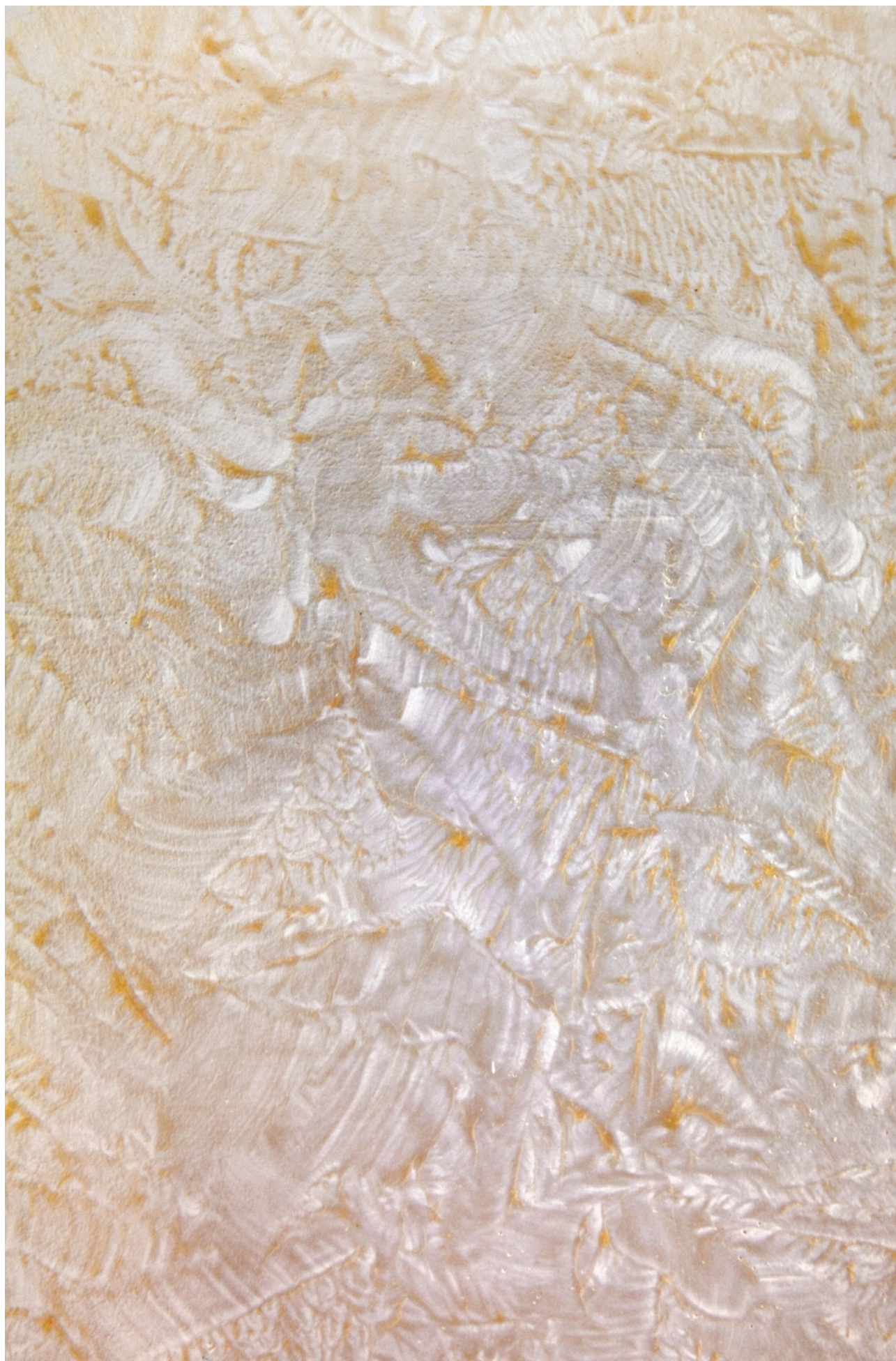
The auditorium is created by its details. The similarity in form between the ceiling, the glass wall, the gallery and the chairs stems from the common whole to which they belong.

הפרטים יוצרים את האודיטוריום. הדמיון הצורני שבין התקרה, קיר הזכוכית, הגלריה והכיסאות נגזר מהשלם שאליו הם משתייכים.

←  
View towards the auditorium  
מבט לאודיטוריום

The textured gold color on the wall in the public areas distinguishes them from the rest of the spaces. When touched by sunrays they create a unique light in the open space.

מרקם הקירות המוזהב בשטחים הציבוריים מבדיל אותם משאר חלקי הבניין. המפגש עם קרני השמש מציף את החלל באור ייחודי.







The crown has a unique form and color which differentiate it from the rest of the column parts. This stems from the different function it performs.

לכותרת ביטוי צורני וגוון ייחודי המבדיל אותה משאר חלקי העמוד. הוא נגזר מהשוני התפקודי שלה.



→  
Sights from  
within the  
building  
towards the  
square create a  
dialogue  
between the  
two.

המבטים מפנים  
הבניין לכיכר  
יוצרים את הדיאלוג  
בין שניהם.

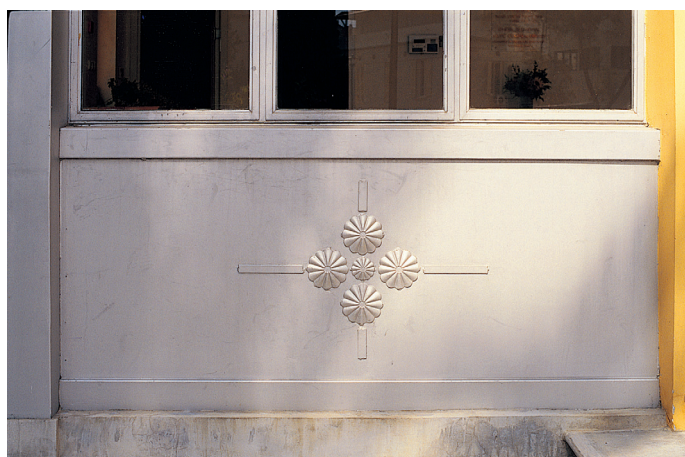
←  
Entrance floor.  
The lobby, the  
auditorium and  
the back garden  
form one visual  
continuum.

קומת הכניסה.  
המבואה,  
האודיטוריום והגן  
שמאחור הם רצף  
ויזואלי אחד.





View to the entrance terrace.  
מבט למרפסת הכניסה.



The left wing of the building is made of silver painted iron panels with flower ornaments.  
האגף השמאלי של הבניין עשוי פנלים מפח צבועים כסף מעוטרים בפרחים.



Entrance to Bialik Square from Bialik Street. Opposite is the first municipal building, on the right the Music Center and Library (Left).

הכניסה לכיכר ביאליק מרחוב ביאליק, מול בניין העירייה הראשון. מימין "מרכז למוסיקה וספריה ע"ש פליציה בלומנטל" (שמאל).

Long distance view towards Bialik Square (Hill) from Idelson street.

מבט רחוק לכיכר (גבעת) ביאליק מכיוון רחוב אידלסון.

Long distance view to Bialik Square (Hill) from The Steps Alley.

מבט רחוק לכיכר (גבעת) ביאליק מכיוון סמטת המדרגות.

Organic integration between the building of the Music Center and Library (1996) in the center and the historical square.

ההשתלבות האורגנית שבין "מרכז מוסיקה וספריה ע"ש פליציה בלומנטל" (1996), שבמרכז, לכיכר ההיסטורית.









# Visual chronology of projects and buildings

## 1973-2011

### כרונולוגיה ויזואלית של פרויקטים ובניינים

SHUTZ RESIDENCE - THE  
HOUSE AROUND THE LEMON  
TREE  
Jerusalem, Israel  
Completion Date 1978

בית דוד שיץ - הבית שמסביב לעץ הלימון



TOCH RESIDENCE 1  
Jerusalem, Israel  
Completion Date 1979

בית טוך 1



MEMORIAL FOR THE FALLEN  
INTELLIGENCE SERVICEMEN  
Gililot Tel Aviv, Israel  
Competition Entry 1982 - Purchase Prize

אתר הנצחה לקהילת המודיעין



MASTER PLAN FOR  
NEIGHBORHOOD RENEWAL  
Ramat Amidar Ramat Gan, Israel  
Design Phase 1982

תכנית אב להתחדשות  
שכונת רמת עמידר



STEINBAUM RESIDENCE  
Jerusalem, Israel  
Completion Date 1982

בית שטיינבאום



BAR-RESTAURANT -  
CONVERSION OF THE OLD  
RAILWAY STATION  
Jerusalem, Israel  
Design Phase 1982

בר-מסעדה - רה"תכנון תחנת הרכבת הישנה



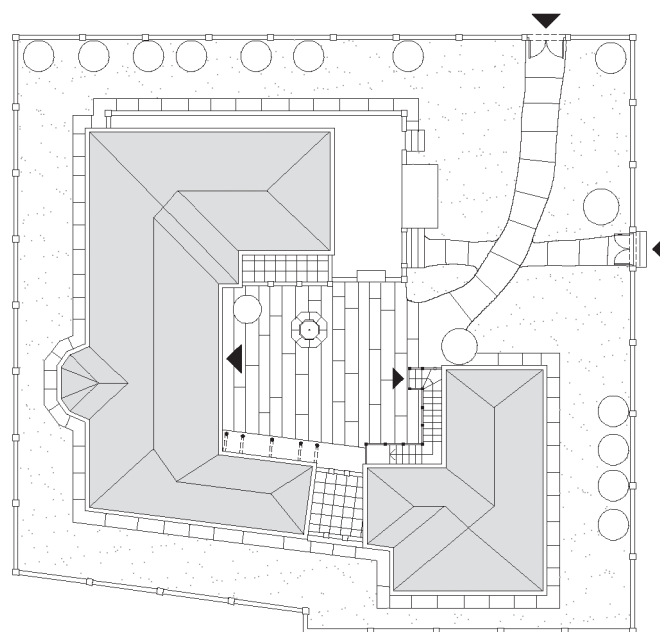
BAR-RESTAURANT -  
CONVERSION OF A 19TH  
CENTURY BUILDING  
Jerusalem, Israel  
Design Phase 1982

בר-מסעדה - רה"תכנון בניין מהמאה ה-19

VILLAGE CENTERS RENEWAL  
PROJECT  
Bnei Re'em, Israel  
Design Phase 1983  
Neve Mivtach, Israel  
Design Phase 1983  
התחדשות מרכזי מושבים

IDEA MODEL FOR COMMUNITY  
VILLAGES  
Competition Entry 1984 - Purchase  
Prize  
תכנון רעיוני למושב שיתופי

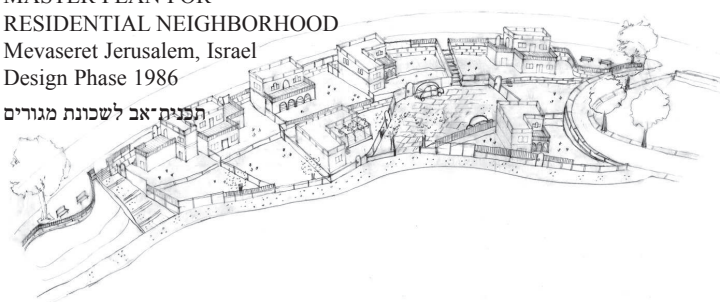
WELFARE CENTRAL BUREAU  
Tel Aviv, Israel  
Design Phase 1984  
המרכז לשירותי רווחה



RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD  
Kibbutz Givat Haim Ichud, Israel  
Design Phase 1985  
שכונת מגורים בקיבוץ



MASTER PLAN FOR  
RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD  
Mevaseret Jerusalem, Israel  
Design Phase 1986  
תכנית אב לשכונת מגורים





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#### APARTMENTS HOUSE

Givatayim, Israel  
Design Phase 1986

בית מגורים



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#### NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER (SHOPS; SYNAGOGUE)

Jerusalem, Israel  
Completion Date:

Shops 1987

Synagogue 1995

מרכז שכונתי (חנויות; בית כנסת)

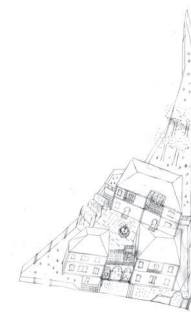


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#### RESIDENTIAL CLUSTER

Jerusalem, Israel  
Design Phase 1987

אשכול מגורים

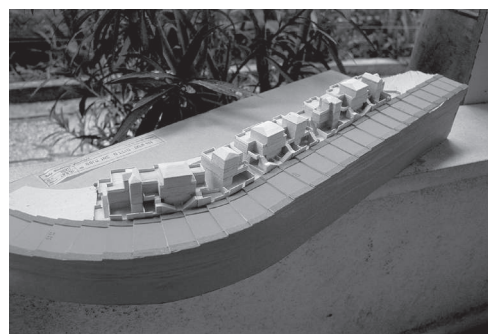


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#### HOUSING PROJECT

Pisgat Zeev Jerusalem, Israel  
Design Phase 1987

פרויקט מגורים

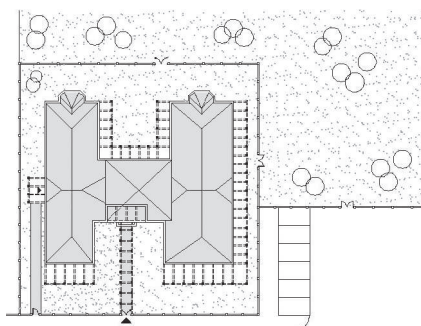


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#### CHILDREN DAY CENTER

Tel Aviv, Israel  
Design Phase 1988

מעון יום לילדים



A SENIOR CITIZENS DAY  
CENTER

Tel Aviv, Israel  
Completion Date 1988

מרכז יום לקשישים



"VILLAS CITY" RESIDENTIAL  
NEIGHBORHOOD

Rishon Lezion, Israel  
Competition Entry 1988 - First Prize

"עיר הווילות" - שכונת מגורים



HOUSE FOR THE ELDERLY AND  
COMMERCIAL CENTER

Rishon Lezion, Israel  
Competition Entry 1988

בית אבות



MEMORIAL SITE

Eshtaol Forest, Judea Mountains,  
Israel  
Design Phase 1988

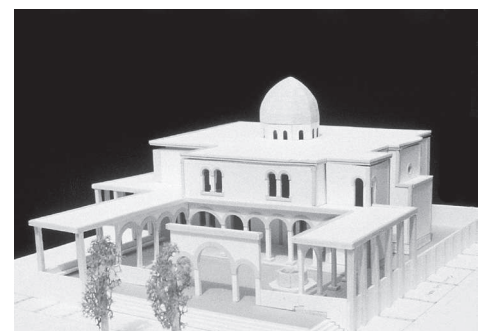
אתר הנצחה



THE MAIMONIDES CENTRAL  
SEPHARADIC SYNAGOGUE

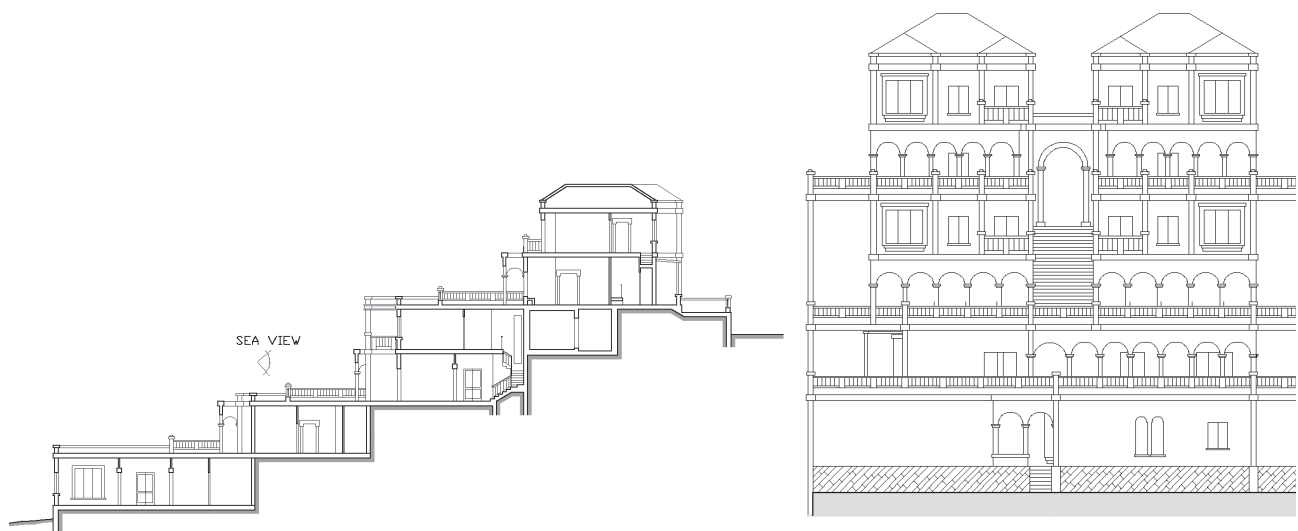
Hadera, Israel  
Competition Entry 1988 - First Prize  
Design Phase 1988  
Construction phase 2011

בית הכנסת הספרדי המרכזי ע"ש הרמב"ם

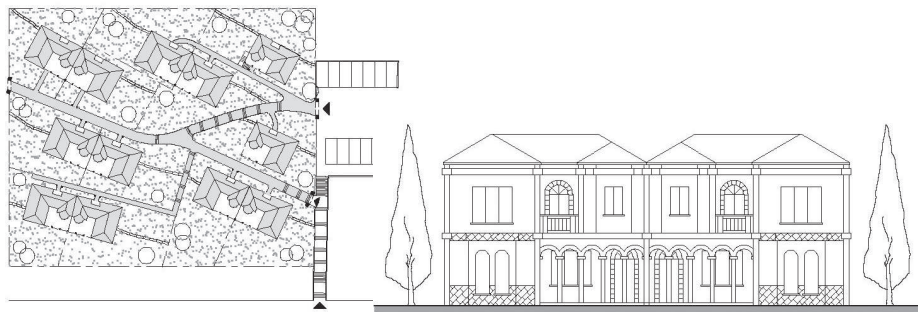




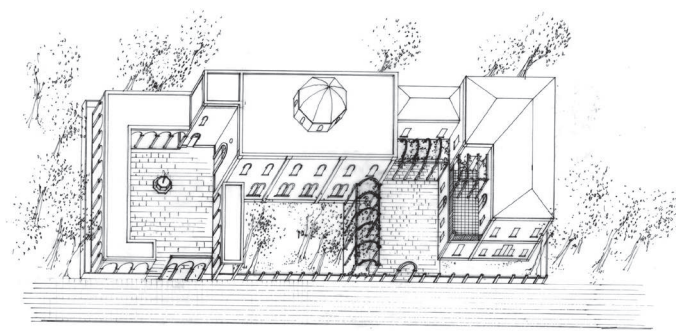
HOUSING PROJECT  
Tiberius, Israel  
Design Phase 1989  
פרויקט מגורים



RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD  
Tiberius, Israel  
Design Phase 1989  
שכונת מגורים



SPIRITUAL CENTER  
(SYNAGOGUE, YESHIVA)  
Kiryat Shmone, Israel  
Design Phase 1989  
מרכז רוחני (ישיבה; בית כנסת)

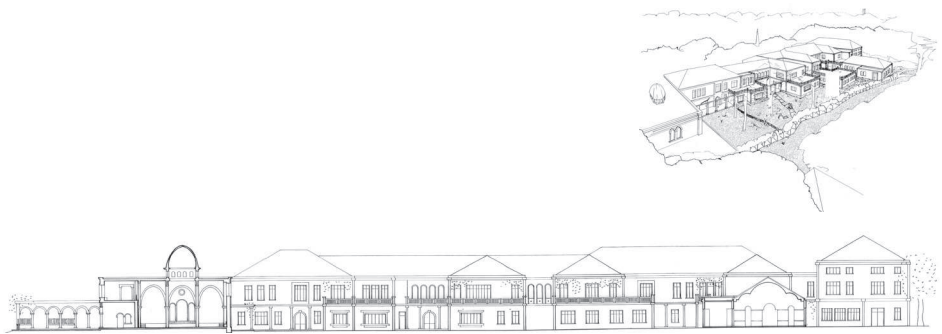
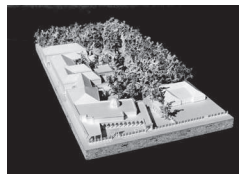


HOCHMAN RESIDENCE  
Kiryat Ono, Israel  
Completion Date 1990  
בית הוכמן



JEWISH COMPREHENSIVE  
SCHOOL  
Sharlotenburg, Berlin, Germany  
Competition Entry 1990

בית הספר היהודי המקיף



CITY SQUARE  
Kiryat Shmone, Israel  
Competition Entry 1990

רֶהִיטְכְנוֹן כִּיכָר העיר



BEN ABRAHAM RESIDENCE  
Zichron Yaakov, Israel  
Completion Date 1990

בית בן־אברהם



SHTEMLER RESIDENCE  
Cesaria, Israel  
Design Phase 1990

בית שטמלר



MUSIC LIBRARY  
Beit Ariela Central City Library,  
Tel Aviv, Israel  
Completion Date 1991

הספרייה למוזיקה



WEST YEFET HATSOFRIM  
DEVELOPMENT  
Old Jaffa, Israel  
Design Phase 1991-2004

רֶהִיטְכְנוֹן מתחם רחוב יפת והצורפים



POST OFFICE - CONVERSION  
Givatayim, Israel  
Completion Date 1991

רֶהִיטְכְנוֹן הדואר המרכזי



PORTUGALI RESIDENCE  
Zichron Yaakov, Israel  
Completion Date 1991

בית פורטוגלי





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## HIGH DENSITY HOUSING

Givatayim

Design Phase: 1991; 2003

פרויקט מגורים



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## MOBILE MARKETS

Ramat Gan, Israel

Completion Date 1992

Maalot Tarshicha, Israel

Completion Date 1993

Eilat

Design Phase 1998

שווקים ניידים



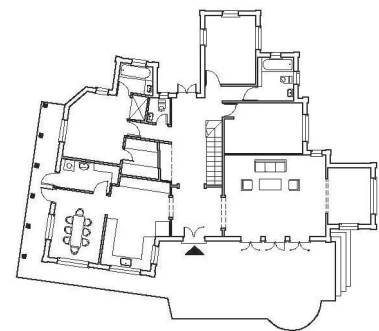
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## LAOR RESIDENCE

Kinneret, Israel

Design Phase 1992

בית לאור



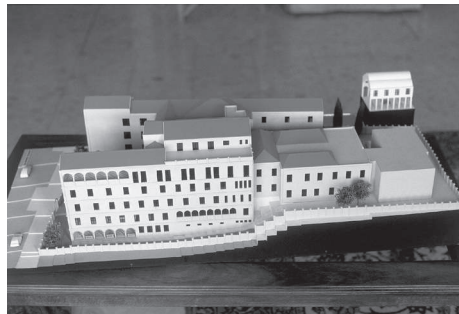
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## TOWN HALL EXTENSION

Ramat Gan, Israel

Design Phase 1992

בניין העירייה - תוספת



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## HEALTH CLINIC

Givatayim

Design Phase 1993

מרפאה



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## HOUSING RENEWAL

Beer Sheva, Israel

Design Phase 1993

התחדשות שכונת מגורים



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## SENIOR CITIZENS DAY CENTER

Eilat, Israel

Competition Entry, 1993

מרכז יום לקשישים

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## COMMUNITY CENTER

Or Akiva, Israel

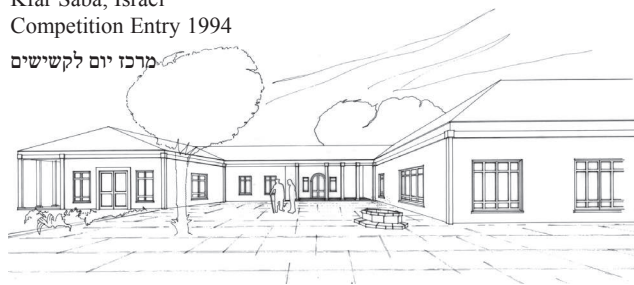
Competition Entry 1994

מרכז קהילתי

SENIOR CITIZENS DAY CENTER

Kfar Saba, Israel  
Competition Entry 1994

מרכז יום לקשישים



TOCH RESIDENCE 2

Jerusalem, Israel  
Completion Date 1995

בית טוך 2



RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD

Kfar Yona, Israel  
Competition Entry 1995

שכונת מגורים

COMMUNITY CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Ashkelon, Israel  
Design Phase 1995

מרכז קהילתי לאמנויות



THE ISRAEL NATIONAL WAR  
MEMORIAL CENTER

Mount Eitan Jerusalem  
Competition Entry 1995

המרכז הלאומי למערכות ישראל

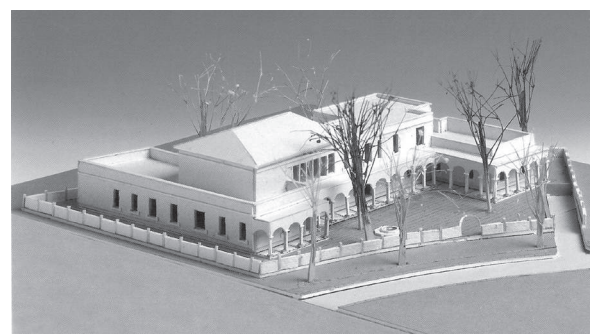


ISRAEL DEFENCE FORCES

VETERANS CENTER

Ramat Gan, Israel  
Competition Entry 1995 - First Prize

בית צוות - ארגון גמלאי צה"ל



RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD

Beit Dagan, Israel  
Competition Entry 1996

שכונת מגורים

LOFTS (APARTMENTS, SHOPS)

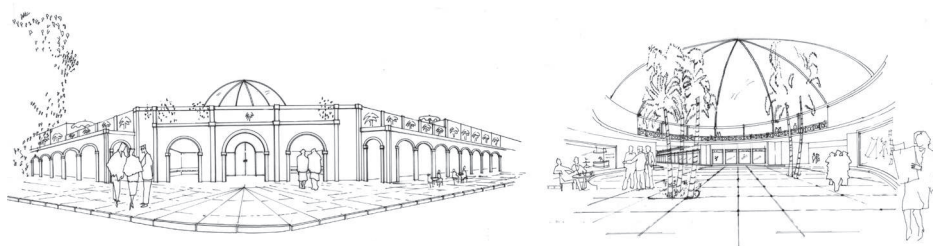
Jaffa, Israel  
Design Phase 1996

בנין לופטים למגורים





SHOPPING MALL  
Dimona, Israel  
Competition Entry 1996  
מרכז קניות



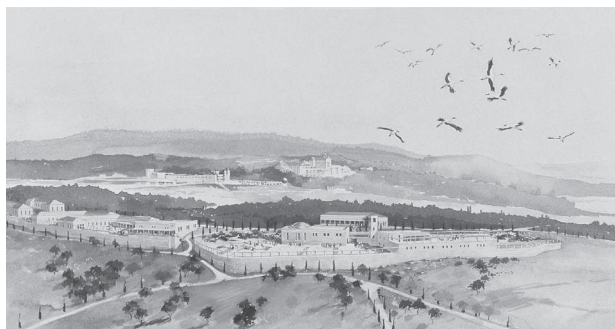
OHEL SHEM COMMUNITY AND  
SCHOOL LIBRARY  
Ohel Shem High School,  
Ramat Gan, Israel  
Completion Date 1996  
ספרייה קהילתית אוהל שם



MUSIC CENTER & LIBRARY  
Tel Aviv, Israel  
Completion Date 1997  
"מרכז מוזיקה וספרייה"



INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR  
THE STUDY OF BIRD  
MIGRATION AND FIELD STUDY  
SCHOOL  
Armored Corps Memorial Site,  
Latrun, Israel  
Design Phase 1997  
במרכז הבינלאומי לחקר נדידת הציפורים



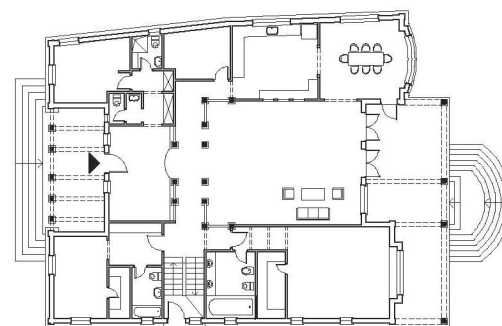
CAFETERIA PAVILION  
Blich High School Ramat Gan, Israel  
Design Phase 1998  
ביתן קפיטריה



GRANT RESIDENCE  
Herzlia Pituach, Israel  
Design Phase 1998  
בית גרנט



TSELMAYER RESIDENCE  
Cesarea, Israel  
Design Phase 1998  
בית צלרמאיר



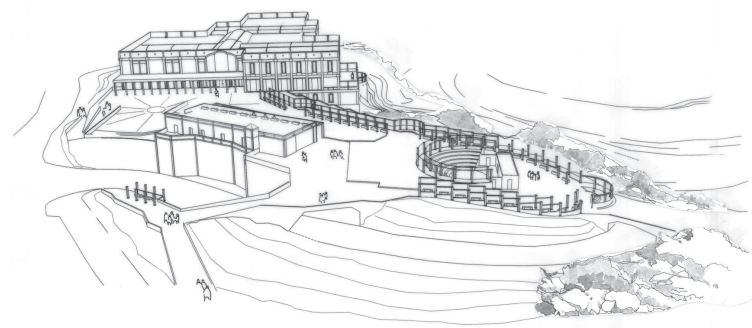
CULTURAL CENTER AND  
LIBRARY  
Kibbutz Mishmar Haemek, Israel  
Design Phase 1999  
מרכז תרבות וספרייה



COMMERCIAL AND LEISURE  
CENTER  
Re'em Junction, Israel  
Design Phase 1999  
מרכז מסחרי ופנאי



CENTRAL CITY LIBRARY AND  
RESOURCE CENTER  
Haifa, Israel  
Competition Entry 1999  
מרכז משאבים וספרייה



DAVID RESIDENCE  
Zichron Yaakov, Israel  
Completion Date 1999  
בית דוד



GLIK APARTMENT -  
CONVERSION  
Tel Aviv, Israel  
Completion Date 2000  
דירת משפחת גליק



THE "KHAN" HERITAGE  
CENTER AND CENTER FOR  
THE ARTS  
Hadera, Israel  
Design Phase 2000  
ה"חאן" - מרכז מורשת ואמנויות





RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD  
IN THE KIBBUTZ

Kibbutz Maagan Michael, Israel

Completion Date:

Stage 1 2001

Stage 2 2004

שכונת מגורים בקיבוץ

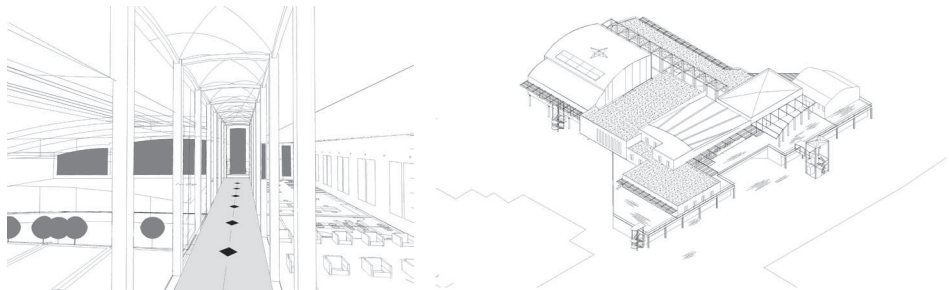
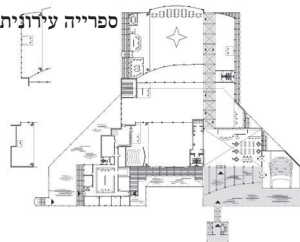


CENTRAL CITY LIBRARY

Ramat Gan, Israel

Design Phase 2001

ספרייה עירונית



THE STUDENT DORMITORIES

Technion Institute Of Technology

Haifa, Israel

Competition Entry 2001

מגורי סטודנטים

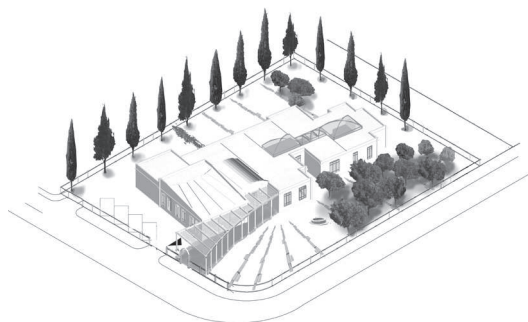


A SENIOR CITIZENS DAY  
CENTER

Hadera, Israel

Competition Entry 2002

מרכז יום לקשישים



IR YAMIM COMMUNITY  
CENTER

Netanya, Israel

Design Phase 2004

מרכז קהילתי



HASHOMER APARTMENTS AND  
SHOPS

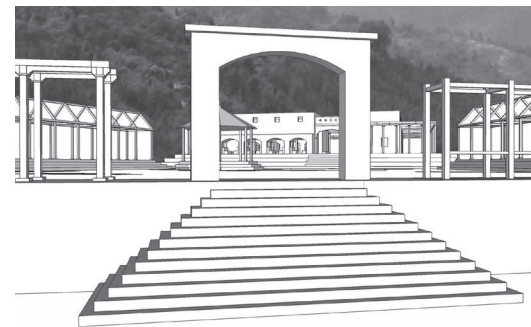
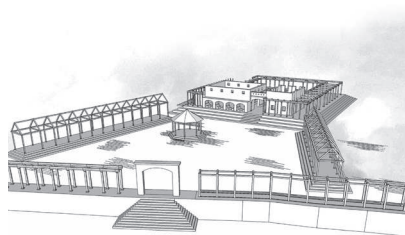
Tel Aviv, Israel

Completion Date 2004

בניין מגורים וחנויות



TELE MEDICINE HEALTH &  
COMMUNITY CENTER  
Sanfe bagar, Nepal  
Competition entry 2007  
מרכז קהילתי ומרפאה



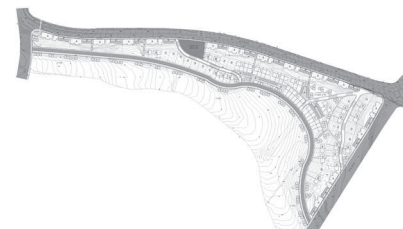
GNAZIM, THE NATIONAL  
LITERATURE ARCHIVE -  
Ramat Gan, Israel  
Design phase 2007  
הארכיון הלאומי גנזים

TOCH RESIDENCE, ROOF  
APARTMENT  
Jerusalem, Israel  
Design phase 2007  
בית טוך, דירת גג

ERLICH APARTMENT  
Ramat Hasharon, Israel  
Completion date 2008  
דירת משפחת ארליך



RESIDENTIAL  
NEIGHBORHOOD  
Ramat Bet Shemesh  
Design phase 2008  
שכונת מגורים



RESIDENTIAL PROJECT  
Tzahala, Tel Aviv, Israel  
Construction phase 2011  
דירות גן וגג





**"The Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library", a magnificent building designed by architect Nili Portugali and built in 1996 on Bialik Square, is the only contemporary layer that has been added to this unique district, at the very center of the historic heart of the city of Tel Aviv.**

**"The powerful presence of a building in its environment emanates from it being an integral part of it and not from the efforts to distinguish it from its environment by creating an architectural icon. Nevertheless preserving the spirit of an existing environment does not necessarily mean a fanatic repetition of its language."**

**Bialik Square (named after Haim Nachman Bialik, Israel's national poet) is a micro document of the architectural history of the city of Tel Aviv. Here stands the first Tel Aviv municipal building built in the eclectic period of the 1920's, as well as buildings dating from the 1930's, when International Style was the "dernier cri".**

**The book aims to trigger a public discussion regarding central debates, challenging the general public and 21st-century architects, as how should contemporary architecture intervene within an existing environment in general and the one with a significant historical value in particular, respecting and preserving the existing one.**

**What is unique in Portugali's work (including in this building) that even the most modern buildings look as if they've been there forever.**

**Portugali argues that in order to change the feeling of the environment and create buildings we really feel "at home" with and want to live in, what is needed is not a change of style or fashion, but an adaptation of a holistic and cross- cultural worldview that will transform the mechanistic worldview underlying current thought and approaches. The Music Center and Library, more than any other building designed by Portugali expresses her unique planning process and her particular interpretation of the holistic phenomenological worldview. A worldview which stands in recent years at the forefront of the scientific discourse, and is tightly related to the Buddhist philosophy.**

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**The book, first of its kind, is valuable to anyone who aspires to create Timeless places endowed with spirit and soul that we really want to live in, in any culture, any society and at any place.**

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**Nili Portugali was born in Israel in 1948; 7th generation descendent of a family living in the holy city of Safed since the early 19th century.**

**She is a practicing architect working in Israel for more than 38 years.**

**Her work focuses on both practice and theory and is closely connected to the holistic- phenomenological school of thought. She is a graduate of the prestigious Architectural Association School of Architecture in London (1973).**

**She did postgraduate studies in architecture and Buddhism at the University of California, Berkeley. She worked and participated in research with Prof. Christopher Alexander at the Center for Environmental Structure, Berkeley California.**

**She was senior lecturer at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Architectural Department, Jerusalem and taught at the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning at the Technion, Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa. Her firm is involved in a variety of projects in urban design, architecture, landscape design and interior design, disciplines she regards as one continuous system**

**Her book: The Act of Creation and the Spirit of a Place. A Holistic- Phenomenological Approach to Architecture published by Edition Axel Menges / Stuttgart, was among the 24 books selected by the Royal Institute of British Architects International Book Award for the year 2007. Portugali has recently completed the script for a film which she will direct and do the production design.**

**Maoz Azaryahu is professor of Cultural Geography in Haifa University, Israel.**

